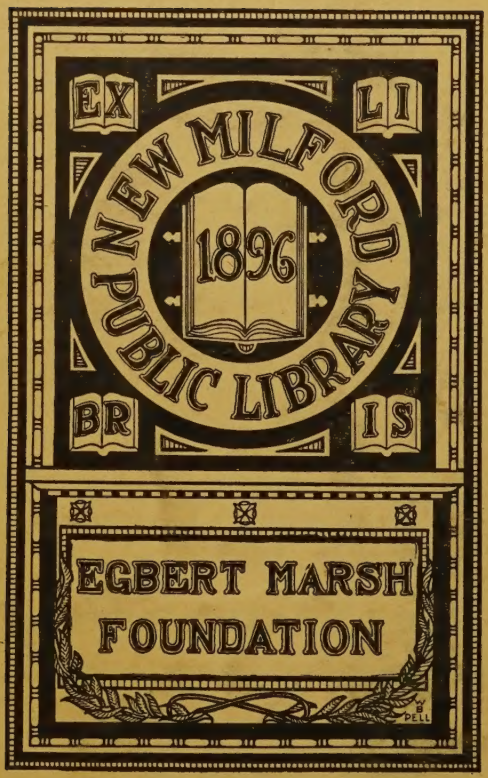
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Tom landed in the water, causing all the ducks and geese to set up a deafening

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BILLY WHISKERS KIDNAPED

BY

FRANCES TREGO MONTGOMERY

AUTHOR OF THE BILLY WHISKERS SERIES, FRANCES AND THE IRREPRESSIBLES AT BUENA VISTA FARM, THE WONDERFUL ELECTRIC ELEPHANT, ON A LARK TO THE PLANETS, A CHRISTMAS WITH SANTA CLAUS, ETC.

Illustrated by Arthur DeBebian

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Tom landed in the water, causing all the ducks and geese to set up a deafening clatter.

The rope slipped through their fingers with such rapidity that it took all the skin from the inside of their hands.

"Somebody get some water while I chafe his hands!"

Billy came in only a few paces behind Bettina, baaing his displeasure at the whole performance.

"First," said Billy, "we will walk around in a circle, slowly lifting first one foot and then the other."

In walked the procession, with Button in the lead and Billy and Bettina side by side.

CHAPTER I

BILLY WHISKERS IS KIDNAPED

THE whole Billy Whiskers family was sleeping peacefully, from Billy to Nannie, his wife, and from his son and his wife to their pair of twins, at the foot of the old straw stack in the barnyard, when Billy was awakened by a slight noise in the lane that led to the main road. Blinking his eyes to see more clearly, he beheld two men, who looked like tramps, creeping slowly in the shadows and coming directly toward him.

"I wonder what is up," thought Billy to himself. "Horse thieves, probably. If they are, I'll wait until they enter the barn and then I'll butt them straight through the door and keep them there until morning, so Mr. Watson can catch them."

All this time the men were creeping closer and closer, every now and then throwing the rays of a dark lantern around on the ground as if in search of something they expected to find lying along the lane.

"What in the world are they after, anyway?" thought Billy.

Just then a ray of the lantern fell full upon Billy and made his eyes shine like coals of fire.

"There he is, Jim! That big white goat over by the straw stack—don't you see him? The big one that looms head and shoulders higher than the others, even if he is lyin' down. Can't you hurry and lasso him now, before he has a chance to get up and run?"

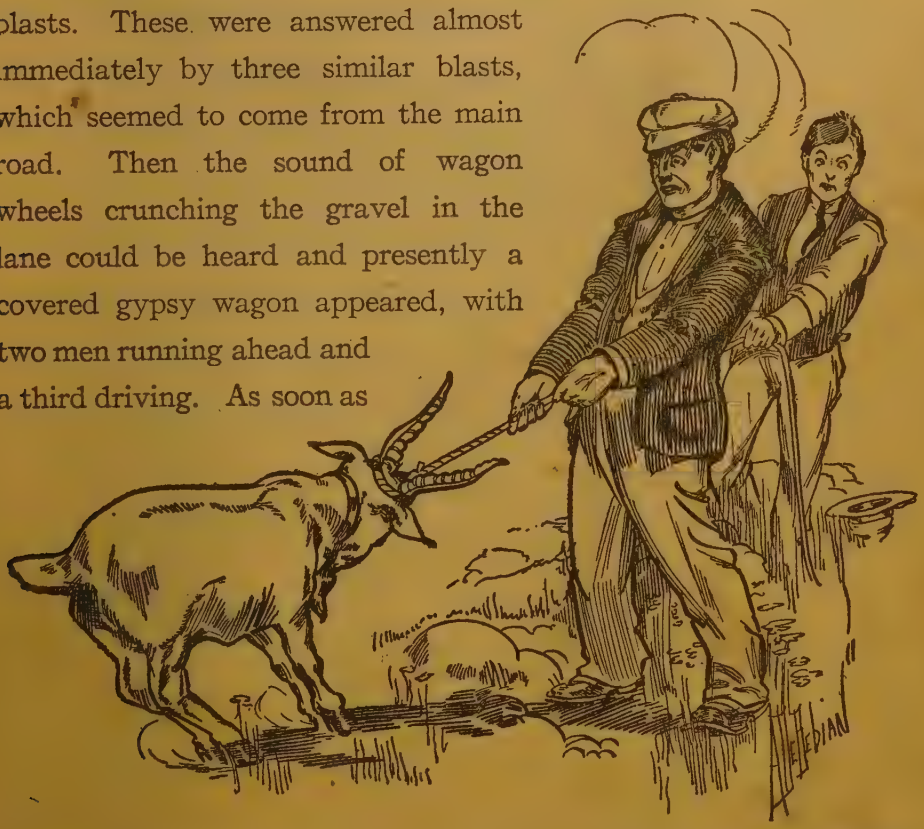
This evidently was what the other man had been doing while his pal was talking, for before Billy realized that they were after him, he saw a long coil of rope flying toward him, hissing as it came, and before he could move, he felt the rope slip over his horns; the next instant the two men gave it a jerk that pulled him to his feet.

"Come along, my fine fellow, and we won't hurt you, but if you try to kick up any monkeyshines, we'll bang you into the middle of next week," said the first speaker, whom his pal addressed as Sam.

"Ho, ho! you two smarties think you'll lead me like a little woolly lamb, do you? Well, you don't know William Whiskers as well as you think you do if that is your opinion."

Billy dug his fore feet into the ground, humped up his back, and braced himself until both the men were leaning away over backward pulling for all they were worth, so when Billy suddenly came forward, of course he sent them sprawling. Not waiting for them to arise, he butted first one and then the other and was going

back to give the first man a second butt, when one of the men drew from his pocket a whistle on which he blew three, short, sharp blasts. These were answered almost immediately by three similar blasts, which seemed to come from the main road. Then the sound of wagon wheels crunching the gravel in the lane could be heard and presently a covered gypsy wagon appeared, with two men running ahead and a third driving. As soon as

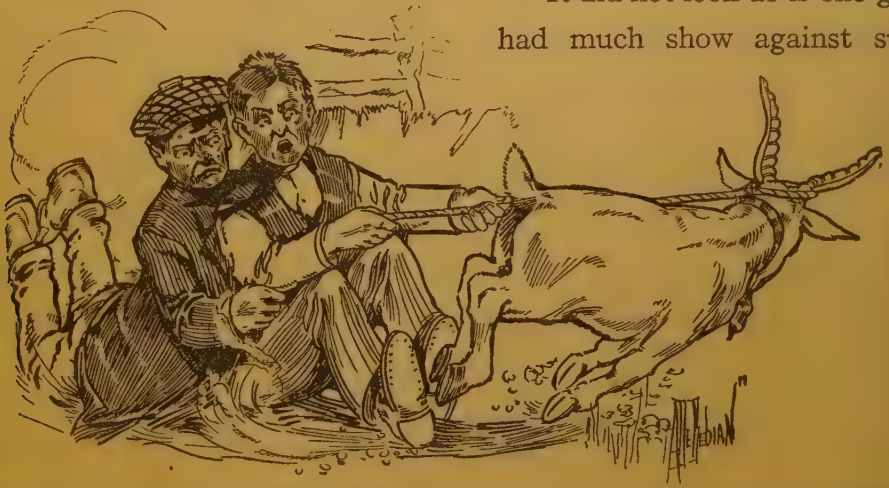


it came to where Billy was, they shoved out of the back of it a wooden chute like those used to unload coal, and dropped one end on the ground, leaving the other end braced against the back of the wagon.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

Billy had been so much interested in watching all these maneuvers that he had not thought about the danger to himself, but now he was fully aware of it as he saw one of the men approaching him with a pitchfork in his hand and the other with a long-lashed whip.

Here Billy was with a lasso around his horns and two men pulling at the rope and two more coming to force poor Billy up the chute into the wagon. How helpless he seemed!



It did not look as if one goat had much show against such odds, but Billy, being brave, decided to give them some trouble, even if he did not succeed in escaping.

His first move was to spring for the chute and butt it off the end of the wagon. His next, to run under the wagon, dragging the

two men after him. They both tried to catch hold of the wheels to save themselves and they succeeded in doing it, but at the loss of the rope around Billy's horns, which slipped through their fingers with such rapidity that it took all the skin from the inside of their hands, and they swore vengeance upon him.

Instead of Billy running between the wheels, he went straight for the horse's hind legs and literally went between them, throwing the horse into such a panic that it kicked and kicked at this unknown thing and tried to run away, but the man driving, being a powerful fellow, soon quieted it.

And now, to Billy's dismay, he found the rope around his horns had twisted about the wheel in some way and he could not get loose.

The men saw their advantage and left him with his head bowed to the ground until they could place the chute again in the wagon, as it was before Billy butted it over.

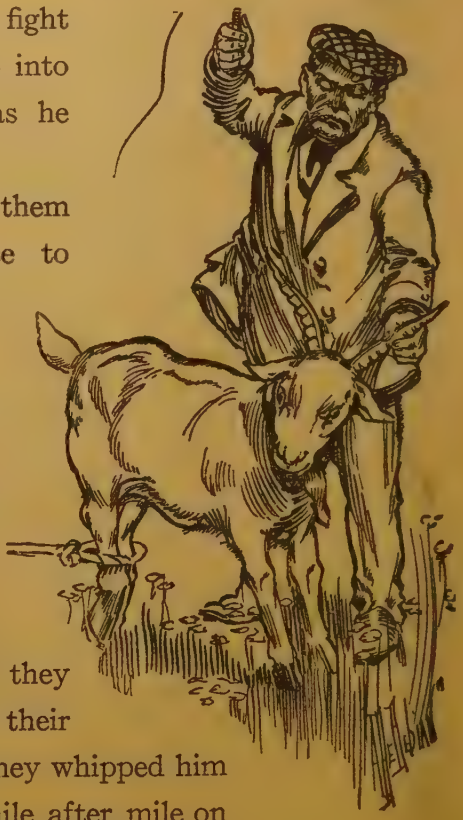
Then all four of them went to Billy, one loosening the rope, another holding the pitchfork so he could not run forward and butt, the third fastening another rope around his hind legs, and the fourth lashing him with a whip, and swearing under his breath at every blow.

"Now get into that wagon, you blamed goat, and do it quick or I'll cut you into chops with this whip and pitch you into the wagon

in pieces. We've had enough foolin' around here already, for if we don't get out of here soon, we'll be caught."

Seeing that it was useless to fight any more at present, Billy ran up into the wagon, thinking to himself as he did so:

"I might just as well go with them peacefully and wait my chance to escape later as to try to fight it out against such odds."



The second that Billy was in the wagon, the men buttoned down the back curtain and made everything tight and then, jumping into the front, started the horse, driving quietly at first. In fact, they made him walk until they were too far away for the sound of their wheels to reach the house. Then they whipped him unmercifully and kept him going mile after mile on a lively trot until he was ready to drop from fatigue.

Billy paid close attention to the direction in which they were going and, knowing the country so well, he could tell pretty nearly

where they were taking him by the hills they went up and down and the bridges they crossed.

Presently he overheard this conversation, which gave him quite an idea of where he was going and why he had been kidnaped. He heard Sam say:

"If old Mr. Watson hadn't been so stiff-necked about not sellin' his goat, we wouldn't have all this trouble. Them circus people offered him a big sum for this goat, but he positively refused to sell him, just because he said he was attached to him. Now what do you think of that? A man refusin' one hundred dollars for a Billy goat just because he was attached to him! I see myself carin' enough for anything not to take a cool hundred cash. Why, I'd sell my wife and one of my children for half that sum."

"How do you know the circus people will buy him when we get him there?" asked Jim.

"Because Ben, me pal, that travels wid 'em, said as how they had been lookin' for months fer just such a goat to take to Europe wid 'em and they couldn't find any big enough. And what's more, the time is gettin' short and they says to Ben, 'Ben, if ye can get us a dandy big goat, nearly twice as big as any you ever see before, we'll give you a couple of hundred for him.'

"'I'm yer man,' says Ben, 'I know where there's such a goat

and I'll have him here at the depot ready to ship to join the show in Chicago before three days is past.'

"'All right,' said the man, 'the money is yours the day the goat is delivered.'"

"Now," said Jim, "the minute the goat is missed, Mr. Watson will advertise for him high and low, and we may be caught with the stolen goods."

"Oh, no, we won't! We'll paint him brown, so while the papers are looking for a white goat, we'll sneak our brown goat out of the country under their very noses."

"Well, we'd better stop and do some painting as soon as it is light, for we are in more danger of being spotted here than we are when we get in a part of the country where Mr. Watson is not so well known."

"So this is what I was stolen for—to be sent to Europe," thought Billy. "If it were not for leaving Nannie, my children and grandchildren, I should rather like a trip across the ocean, for I know I should enjoy seeing some of those countries Night and Day used to tell Nannie and me so much about after they came back from their long voyage to Constantinople. As it is, I shan't go without Nannie, and these men will have many a hard day before them before they land me even in Chicago. How I wish Stubby and Button were with me."

As if in reply to his wish, he heard a low bark come from under the wagon, and looking through a crack in the floor, he saw Stubby trotting along contentedly underneath.

"Stub, can you hear me?" sniffed Billy through the crack.

"Yes, go ahead. I hear every word."

Then Billy told him what he had overheard the men say.

"Can't you run back and tell Nannie and Billy Junior where they are taking me, and for them not to worry, for I shall never go to Europe, but shall get away and come back soon?" said Billy. "Then you can come back and go with me on the train, for you see they are headed for the station, and there is no train until six-thirty."

"No, I won't go back, but I'll get Button to go as he can travel faster than I can across lots."

"Is Button with you?"

"Yes, he is running along on top of the fence now. He saw the men trying to kidnap you, so followed ——"

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your coming. You two are the dandiest, truest friends any goat ever had!"

"I'll go tell Button now."

Had the stars taken the trouble to look down, they would have seen a big, black cat running at break-neck speed for Mr. Watson's farm, straight as the crows fly, to carry the news to Billy's wife.

Then, had they continued to look, they would have seen that same black cat traveling with equal speed straight for the station, which he reached just in time to hide in a freight car as the train pulled out, with Billy and Stubby and two of the kidnapers, Sam and Jim, on board, bound for Chicago.

The rope slipped through their fingers with such rapidity that it took all the skin from the inside of their hands.

CHAPTER II

BILLY ESCAPES FROM THE KIDNAPERS

LICK-ET-Y CLICK! Click-et-y click!" sang the car wheels as the train sped along the rails, bearing Billy Whiskers farther and farther away from home. But with every turn he was trying to think of some way to escape from the kidnapers.

"Stubby, can you think of any way to get away from these men?" asked Billy.

"No, I can't at present. The only thing for you to do is to keep a close watch and some way will turn up unexpectedly; only be ready to act when it does come."

"Mew, mew!" came from Button at the grated window of the freight car they were in, which interpreted meant: "Are you in this car?"

"Hello, Button! Is that you? Come in if you can squeeze your fat body between those iron bars at the window."

"Fat body!" exclaimed Button in disgust. "I am as thin as my shadow, for I haven't had so much as a tiny baby mouse to eat

since morning. Besides, I ran about five pounds off, carrying your message to Nannie, and then running back in time to catch this train. My, but I am thirsty! I wish they would stop at some water tank to water the engine so I could get a drink."

"I thought," said Stubby, "that cats hated water so that they never even drank it."

"If that is so, you ought to think again."

"We are going so slowly I believe we will stop soon," said Billy. "Button, as you are the only one that can climb, suppose you climb up and look out the window and see if we are coming to some town."

Button clambered up, but could see nothing but a prairie on one side and a marshy woods on the other, within the pools of which the frogs were singing their good-night songs, for it was beginning to grow dusk, being near sunset.

"I can't see a thing ahead," said Button. "I'll climb out and run along the top of the cars and see what is ahead."

In two minutes he came back and reported:

"The train has run on a switch to stay until the passenger flyer passes, and they are going to water the engine, so good-bye until I get a drink."

"Say, have any of you fellows a bucket?" asked one of the kidnapers of a man at the water tank. "Because if you have, I'd like to borrow it long enough to give my goat a drink."

"Yes, there is one over by the tank house you can use."

Filling the bucket, he carried it to the car where Billy was a prisoner, unbarred the door, and held the pail for Billy, but the goat butted so much that he finally set the bucket inside, telling Billy to hurry up and drink so he could take the bucket back.

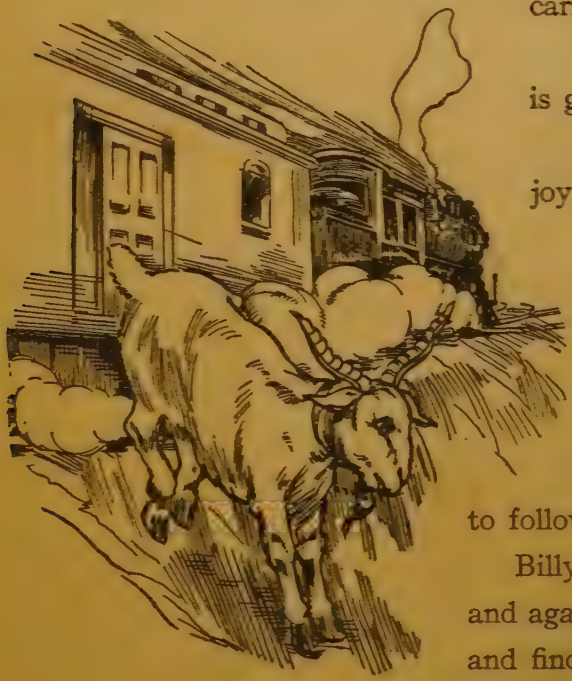
"All aboard! Hurry up, you fellow with the bucket! Lock the door and come on. We're going to start."

"Come, Stubby, and get a drink. There is plenty for us both," said Billy. "The man won't notice you. He is too busy watching for the signal to start."

"All aboard!" called the brakeman again, and the man grabbed the bucket, slammed the door and ran, never looking back to see if it had fastened. He slammed it so hard that instead of catching, it rebounded, and

Billy, seeing his chance, stuck the point of his horns through, then his nose and next his head and shoulders. Then he drew back his head to hide until the train had passed by the water tank, saying to Stubby:

"Get ready, Stub, to follow me, for I am going to jump the minute we pass the water tank. I can easily do it, for the train won't get under way until it is off this switch and on the main track. I wish Button was here. I'm afraid he won't see us and will be carried on."



"Trust him to see what is going on," replied Stubby. "Mew, how did you enjoy your drink, boys?"

"Button, get ready to jump. We are going to jump and take to the woods."

Button swung himself into the car to be ready to follow them from the door.

Billy stuck out his head again and again, and not seeing anyone, and finding there was a nice soft

marshy piece of land in front of him, made a bound and landed safely in the mud, with Stubby and Button close behind him.

"Wish you had decided to land on dry ground instead of in this fishy pond," said Button. "I'm nearly drowned."

"Never mind, Button, you can get the drink you were longing for a little while ago," said Billy.

"I think," said Stubby, "we had better get into the woods where we will be out of sight as soon as we can, for someone may see us from the train and come after us."

So the three friends waded through the marsh and squeezed through a wire fence into the thick wood that bordered the track. And as they watched the two end lights of the train disappear in the distance, they kicked up their heels and laughed to think how they had given the kidnapers the slip.

"They were caught napping this time, sure enough," said Button.

"And you are caught punning," said Stubby.

"Well, boys, what are we going to do now, and where are we going?" asked Billy. "I don't know what you two are going to do, but I am going to eat some grass, leaves or something mighty quick, for I am as hungry as a bear."

"Wish I could eat leaves or grass," said Stubby. "It would save such a lot of trouble. Now Button and I will have to kill a night bird, field mouse, or something of that kind, or else go hungry."

"Seems to me I smell clover," said Billy, raising his head and sniffing at the wind.

"You surely do," agreed Button.

"Let's go out of the woods, for probably we will find a clover field alongside of it," proposed Billy.

They did, and what is more, Stubby found a ground bird's nest full of eggs as he crowded under the fence that separated the woods from the clover field, and they were nice and warm, for the mother bird had been sitting on them until she saw the three friends coming. Button, who had run on ahead, had caught and eaten both the father and mother bird, so when Stubby ate the eggs, the whole family was disposed of.

"Billy, I wonder what the kidnapers will do when they look in the car and find you have escaped them," said Stubby.

"I expect they will be so angry that they will say all the words that have *darn* and *dam* in them that they can think of. Darning needle, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and so on."

"They will make a fuss with the trainmen and try to lay the blame on them and threaten to sue the company for allowing such a valuable goat to disappear," replied Button.

"I wonder how long it will be before they miss us," said Billy, "and how many miles it will be from here, for the minute they find I am gone, they will start back to look for me."

"Let us hope it will be a good way," said Stubby fervently.

"Well," said Button, "they will have twice as hard a time to find you as you will to dodge them, now you have once gotten away from them, for they won't know whether someone is keeping you for the reward that is sure to be offered for you, or whether you are running loose in some pasture."

"I wonder," said Billy, "who owns this farm and if he is a nice fellow. In the morning we can go up near his stable and take a look around without being seen. If there is any crusty old skinflint living here, we won't stay, but will run away and find a nice farmer. And then we can inquire the shortest way home."

"I think," said Stubby, "that we had better all lie down here in this sweet clover field and sleep, for the clover is so tall that no one can see us. Besides, if the kidnapers should miss us right away, they would never think of looking for us here, but would go to the farmhouse first."

So they all curled up close to each other and were soon fast asleep, for they were very tired and when the moon came up from behind the trees in the woods and went sailing through the sky over the clover field, the man in the moon was surprised to find Billy Whiskers, Stubby and Button away off here, instead of at the old farm with Nannie and the rest of Billy's family.

And when it sailed on still farther west and came to the old

farm and saw poor, tender-hearted Nannie softly crying for her Billy he wished so hard that he could speak and tell her where Billy was that he turned his face from the earth, so he could not see her. And the people on the earth, when they could see the moon's face no longer, thought it was because a cloud had passed over it and shut it from sight.

It was not until early the next morning when the kidnapers went to feed and water Billy that they found he had escaped.

"Well, I think I will go feed, water and curry Billy so he'll look fine when we first show him to the man I'm goin' to sell him to," said one of the kidnapers. "The conductor says we will get in about nine o'clock," and he walked along the top of the freight cars, peeping into every one, looking for the car Billy occupied, but, as you know, he found no goat. When he reached the end of the train, he burst

into the caboose where the other kidnaper was sitting talking to the conductor and train hands, and exclaimed:

"Look here, conductor, there has been a mistake! Last night you must have switched off by mistake the car my goat was in, for I have looked in every car and there's not a goat on this train."

"Oh, your eyesight must be poor," said the conductor. "Of course he must be in one of the cars still, if he ever was in one of them, for we didn't switch off a single car last night, or at any time since we started."

"Well, I know he was on and that I gave him a drink of water just before dark. If anything has happened to that goat, you'll have to pay dearly for him, and unless you find him, I'll sue the road."

"You talk like a crazy lunatic," said the conductor. "Come on, all hands, we will go in search of him."

So all the brakemen, headed by the conductor, hurried out of their seats. In single file they walked along the top of the freight cars, peeping into each one, from the caboose to the engine, but as the kidnaper had said, there was no goat to be seen.

"I shan't give up yet," said the conductor. "He must be asleep in some dark corner and we have missed him. When the train stops at the next siding, I will open every car door, and you will see that what I say is true—that he's asleep in some corner."

When the train ran on the next side track, every brakeman, as well as the conductor and two kidnapers, opened every door and scanned every car, banging the doors shut in disgust when no goat appeared. But though they looked, swore, scolded and fussed, it did no good—the goat was gone and the kidnapers threatened to sue the company for their carelessness, unless the goat was found.

The conductor went to the telegraph office and telegraphed to every station they had passed through along the road, to see if any person had seen a big, white goat jump from a car, or eating along the track or around the stations. But no one had.

The kidnapers now decided to go back to the stop where one of them had given Billy the drink of water and commence their search there.

"We'll have a nice time findin' as sharp a goat as that one, with an all-night start of us," growled one kidnaper to the other.

"You're right, and I'll bet we never lay eyes on him again," said the other.

"Stop your croakin'! Of course we will, but it may not be to-morrow or the day after, but I'm going to find that goat or climb a tree."

"I guess you'll climb a tree all right, all right."

Their money being gone, they could not buy tickets, so they decided to tramp back along the track, looking for Billy as they

went, and begging food and shelter from the people living along the railroad.

So each cut himself a long, straight, pole-like cane to help himself along, and they began their long walk to find Billy.

CHAPTER III

BILLY MEETS THE WIDOW BROWN AGAIN

IN the morning when Billy, Stubby and Button awoke, stretched themselves and looked around, they found they were within a short distance of a very large barnyard, around which were clustered buildings of every description from a barn, bulging with hay and straw, to a pen filled with pigs. Behind the stable was a large cowyard, through the fence of which they could see cows, horses, colts, sheep and goats.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Billy. "This farmer keeps a regular menagerie, it seems to me. The only domestic animals missing are mules and burros."

"Oh, they are there too," said Stubby. "Don't you see that big, white mule over there near the stable door?"

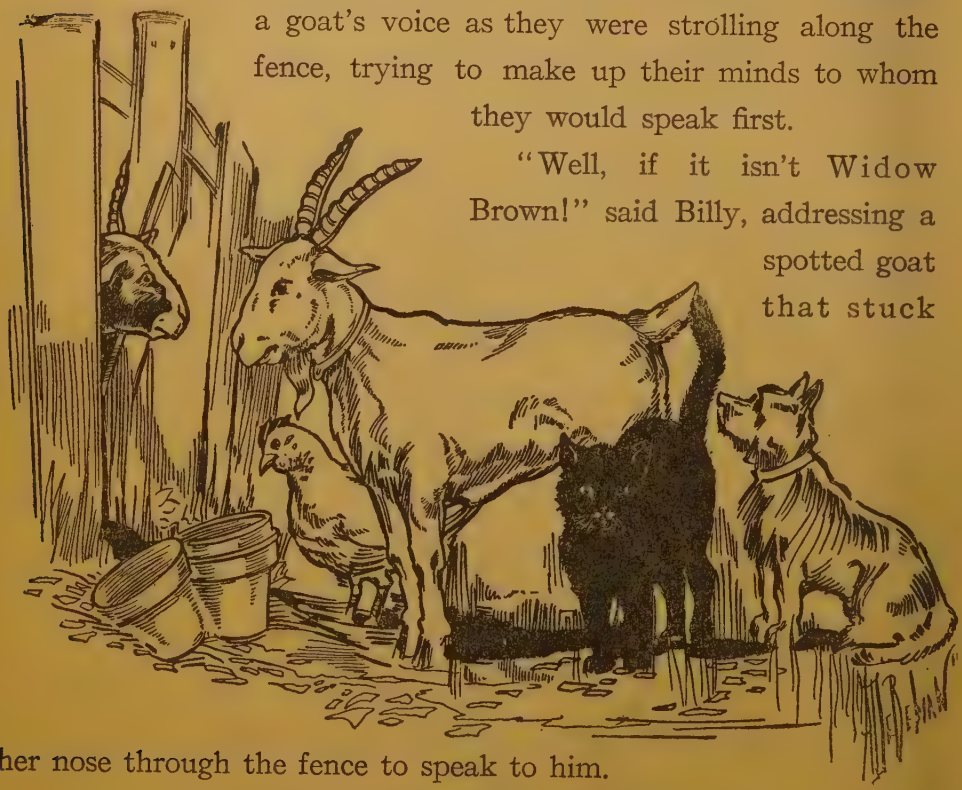
"I took him for a big steer when I first looked," replied Billy. "Let's go up and talk to the animals through the bars of the fence and find out what kind of a man their master is."

"Excellent idea!" exclaimed Button.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

And the three friends walked leisurely toward the stableyard. "By all that's wonderful, is that you, Billy Whiskers?" exclaimed a goat's voice as they were strolling along the fence, trying to make up their minds to whom they would speak first.

"Well, if it isn't Widow Brown!" said Billy, addressing a spotted goat that stuck her nose through the fence to speak to him.



"I can't tell you how delighted I am to see you," she returned cordially. "But how in the world you happen to be here is what puzzles me!"

Then Billy told her about the kidnapers, and she in turn related

how it was she was there and all that had happened to her since last they met, over two years ago.

Looking past Billy just then, she spied Stubby and Button for the first time and nearly fell over in her surprise to find them with Billy.

"Will wonders ever cease? That you three should be traveling together just as you were two years ago when I first met you! If you will all come around to the other side of the cowyard, I will show you a hole no one knows of but me, where you can squeeze through into the yard, and when you get in, I'll find you a good breakfast."

"Trust the Widow Brown to know where there is a hole to crawl through at any time she chooses," said Billy.

At the farther side of the yard, close against the straw stack, where the loose straw hid the opening, a board was off the fence and it was through this hole the three friends crawled.

Once inside the yard, the Widow Brown introduced them to all the animals and then took them into the stable, where she showed Billy a nice pile of turnips and some salt that the farmer had brought for the stock that morning.

"You'll like our master, for he is kind and feeds us well," said the Widow Brown, "and, Stubby, when he sees you and Button he will be lovely to you, for he's very fond of dogs and his little pet

dog that looked a good deal like you died last week, so I think he will be doubly kind to you.

"As for Button, they will stuff him so he can't walk, for they have been wishing for a cat for some time to catch the mice and rats in the granary, and I would suggest that you stroll over to the farmhouse and walk around where the farmer's wife can see you when dinner is over, for they are going to have a nice plump chicken for dinner today."

"I see," said Billy, "that you are up to your same old tricks of knowing what is going on in the house as well as in the barn."

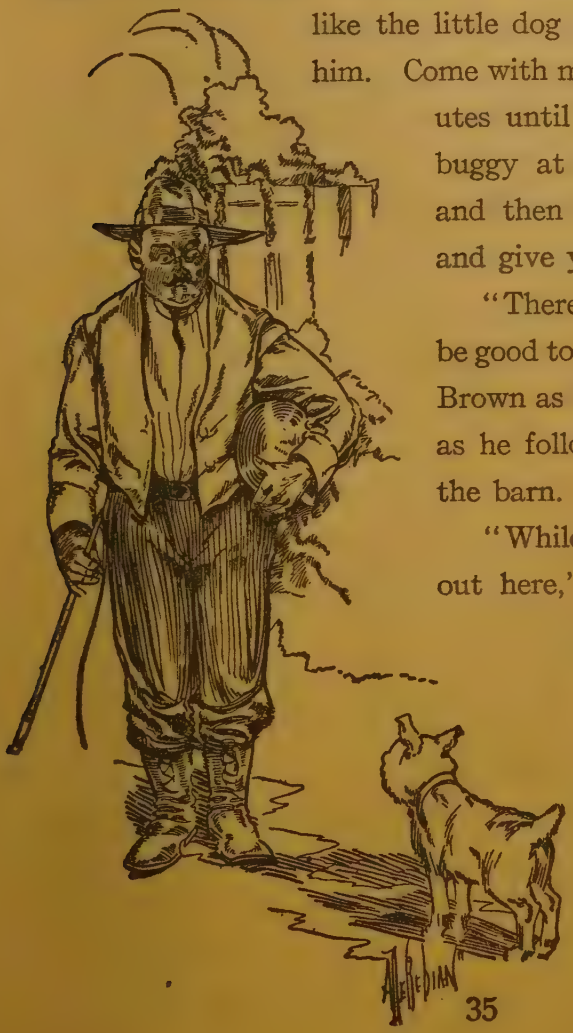
"Well, I would like to know," said Stubby, "how you happened to know that they are going to have chicken for dinner today."

"Oh, that's easy enough! I was in the stable when they were trying to catch the chickens, and I overheard them say they were for today's dinner. All easy enough to know, you see, when once it is explained. But here comes Mr. Blackburn now," continued Widow Brown, looking through a window that faced the house. "Now is your chance, Stubby, to run out and meet him and appear friendly, as if you were not afraid of him."

So Stubby ran up to Mr. Blackburn, wagging his tail as if he had known him all his life.

"Hello, little dog! Where did you come from? You are not much to look at for beauty, but you have fine, honest eyes, and

appear to have a good disposition, which is better than all the beauty in the world without it. Besides, you look a great deal like the little dog that just died, and I loved him. Come with me to the barn for a few minutes until I tell my man to have my buggy at the door right after dinner, and then I'll take you to the house and give you a good meal."



"There! Didn't I tell you he would be good to you?" whispered the Widow Brown as Stubby ran close beside her, as he followed Mr. Blackburn around the barn.

"While they are looking around out here," reflected Button, "I will go get acquainted with his wife."

Though Mr. Blackburn pottered around the barn and looked into the cow-yard, he never saw Billy, and returned to the house to see his wife feeding a

huge, black cat, with the largest yellow eyes he had ever seen.

"My dear, where did you get your cat?"

"I guess from the same place you got your dog," she replied, looking at Stubby, but she did not add—though she thought it—"My new pet is prettier than yours," for she always felt that dogs and cats could understand everything that was said before them, and, being a kind-hearted woman, she would not say anything that would hurt an animal's feelings.

"They must be friends and have come together, don't you think so?" Mr. Blackburn asked his wife.

"Yes, they probably belonged to some gypsies that were passing, who stole them at some house and were not good to them, so they ran away to try to find a new home, when they saw the chimney tops of our house."

"That's very likely, and as we are in need of a cat and a dog, we'll be good to them and see if they won't stay with us."

"They eat as if they were nearly starved. That's just it—probably the gypsies didn't have much to eat, and could not give them much, and so they've made up their minds to look out for themselves."

As Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn were going into the house, he turned and said to Stubby:

"Stay around here, little fellow, and I'll give you a ride to town this afternoon in my buggy."

As the door closed, Stubby ran to the barn to tell Billy and the Widow Brown what a delicious meal he had had, and that he was going to town with Mr. Blackburn right after dinner and that they were to drive.

"You will have many a nice ride, Stubby," said the Widow Brown, "for Mr. Blackburn always took his dog everywhere with him. It will give you an opportunity to hear all the news and gossip in town and along the road. Besides, it will give you a chance to look out for the kidnapers."

"I shall like it very much, for I am fond of driving. I wonder what he will say when he sees Billy for the first time."

Stubby had a most delightful drive, for the day was fine and he sat on the seat beside Mr. Blackburn, who put out his hand and petted him every now and then. Besides, it was much cooler and pleasanter sitting on the seat, taking in everything, than it was running along in the dust behind the trotting horses, as most always he had had to do. And then, too, when he was thirsty, Mr. Blackburn gave him a nice cool drink of fresh water, instead of the muddy water in the gutters that he had always had to drink before. Taking it all in all, he thought Mr. Blackburn was by far the kindest man he had ever met, and already he felt sure he would hate to leave him

when Billy was ready to go. But that would probably not be for some time.

To show that he appreciated Mrs. Blackburn's kindness and the good dinner she had given him, Button wandered around to see if there was not something he could do to please her. As he stood in the kitchen door, he heard her say to Molly, the cook:

"Molly, that old rat has been eating things in the cellar again and he's too sharp to go into the trap to get the cheese. I am sure I don't know what we are going to do about it."

She had forgotten the big, black cat she had given a dinner. Here was just the chance for Button! And he saw it and took it.

Quietly stealing into the cellar, he hid in the coal bin on the coal which was just as black as himself, and all any rat could see were two bright spots that shone like red coals for one minute and the next looked like blue stars. Presently his whiskers began to raise—for he smelt a rat. The next second a big rat, all unsuspecting of a big cat lying in wait for him, ran across the floor not three feet in front of Button's nose. The next he knew something heavy lit on his back, with its teeth in its neck, and Mr. Rat knew no more.

When the rat was quite dead, Button carried it up out of the cellar and laid it by the stove in the kitchen, so Mrs. Blackburn would see it. Then he went back to see if he could not catch some more. He kept doing this until he had one whole family of rats.

The first he caught was the papa rat; then mama rat came out to see why papa rat had not come back, and after waiting a long time and neither their papa nor mama having returned, the big brother went after them, then the big sister, then the next oldest boy and so on until Button had killed seven good-sized rats, all of which the cook found in a row beside the stove when she came in.

Of course Molly was very much surprised, and called Mrs. Blackburn to see what she had in the kitchen.

CHAPTER IV

STUBBY SURPRISES EVERYBODY

HEN Mrs. Blackburn saw the line of rats and Button sitting behind them with twinkling eyes, she clapped her hands with delight and called the cat to her to be stroked.

"So this is what you did to pay for your dinner, is it? Well, if you keep on like this, I shall feed you until you are so fat you can't walk. Molly, bring me a string. I am going to tie these rats up by their tails and hang them in a row on the porch where my husband will see them when he returns from town with his yellow dog. And I am going to ask him what his dog can do to beat that."

When Mr. Blackburn came home and saw the rats dangling in the breeze, he laughed heartily at the new decorations.

"Doggie, do you see those rats your friend has killed? Now it is up to you not to be outdone by a cat, though that cat be your friend. What are you going to do to show my wife that I have as smart a dog as she has a cat?"

Stubby at this moment sat up on his hind legs and put one paw to his head as if thinking. Whether it was accidental and he was merely after a flea will never be known, but Mr. Blackburn declared he did it to help himself think. Be that as it may, Stubby walked off the porch and lay down under a tree and tried to plan something to please Mr. Blackburn and surprise Mr. Blackburn's wife. He thought and thought, but no ideas came to him. At last he heard repeated shots over in the woods beside the lake, and he knew instinctively that some men were shooting ducks. Then an idea came to him like a flash, and he jumped up and started in the direction from which the sound of the shooting had come.

He ran so fast that he was all out of breath when he reached the margin of the lake. And just as he arrived there, he heard a splash in the reeds and grasses before him, as two plump mallard ducks dropped into the water.

"Now is my chance," thought Stubby, "to steal them before the hunters have time to send their water spaniels after them."

So he jumped into the water, swam to where the ducks were, and, taking one in his mouth by its neck, he swam to shore, hid it under a bush and went back for the second one that had fallen among the reeds. He had just time to get it to shore when he heard the hunters' spaniels splashing through the water after them. It took but a few minutes to get the duck he had hidden, and then

with both held tightly in his mouth he started for home. But the ducks were so heavy and his legs so short that he could not run fast enough to get out of the way before the dogs scented him and took up the chase.

Already he could hear them barking and making a fuss as they looked for the missing ducks.

Seeing a hollow log in front of him, Stubby ran into it, dragging the ducks along. After depositing them as far back in the log as he could, he came out and sat at the opening, prepared to fight for them if the hunters' dogs tracked him that far. He was coming to the conclusion that they had given up the chase when he saw a dripping wet spaniel coming toward him, sniffing as he ran. After having followed the wet trail from the lake to the log and seeing Stubby there, the spaniel was sure that the birds had been stolen by this homely little yellow dog sitting before him. And he barked:

"Here, you mongrel, what did you do with those ducks you stole? Hid them somewhere, I suppose, for you haven't had time to eat them. Hurry up and bring them to me!"

But Stubby only sat still and blinked at him. This made the spaniel angry enough to fight, but he did not start it, as it is against the principles of spaniels to fight. On account of their long ears they are at a great disadvantage, for their ears are the first things for which their enemies grab. Stubby knew this, so he quietly

sat before the log and paid no more attention to the spaniel than if he had never spoken.

Of course, this made the spaniel more angry than ever and he ran around and barked and made a great fuss.

The spaniel's master, hearing his dog barking in such an angry manner, hurried through the woods to discover the cause. When he arrived, he saw only an inoffensive yellow dog, instead of a ground-hog, possum or some other animal as he had expected.

"Why, Fruzzle-Fruzzle, what do you mean by barking at that poor, little, frightened dog, only half your size? Shame on you! Where is your master, you poor, little, forlorn dog—or haven't you any?"

But Stubby pretended he was afraid and ran into the log. His fear, however, was not for himself, as the hunter supposed, but he would not budge and when one of the dogs, braver than the rest, tried to make an entrance, he bit his nose so badly that he was glad enough to pull his head out again and leave Stubby in full possession, though he smelt the blood of the ducks.

"Here, here! Come away and find those two ducks I shot, for I saw them drop near here into the lake!" and the hunter called off his dogs and went with them to try to find his game but, as you know, he did not find them.

When Stubby was sure the dogs had gone for good, and there

was no chance of them returning, he cautiously crawled out with one duck in his mouth. With only one he could make better progress through the long grass. So he carried it to the house and dropped it at his master's feet as he sat on the porch, smoking.

"By all that's wonderful, see what that dog's brought me!" Mr. Blackburn exclaimed to his wife, who sat near by. "A freshly killed duck! He must have stolen it from the hunters we heard shooting about an hour ago. The cause of this, my dear, was your doubting my dog was as smart as your cat, and he has done this to prove that he is ten times smarter."

While they were talking, Stubby ran back to get the other duck, and when he appeared with it, they threw up their hands and declared him quite the smartest dog that they had ever seen. And Mrs. Blackburn said he should have all the fat duck legs for his own.

"My, won't the hunter who shot these be angry when his dogs can't find the ducks he probably saw drop!" exclaimed Mr. Blackburn.

After resting a while, Stubby went to find Button, to crow over him—but Button was nowhere to be found.

"I suppose," thought Stubby, "that he has gone to tell Billy about the rats. Well, I'll just appear in time to relate my duck story and make his sound like a thirty-five cent one."

Stubby was right. That was just what Button was doing,

for he found the cat the center of an admiring group of animals who were all standing in the barnyard in a circle, listening to his account. And great was their surprise and admiration of Stubby when he told them what he had done. Button did not wait to hear the end of the story, but wandered back to the house, where he arrived just in time to see a couple of hunters with dogs at their heels going up to the porch to ask Mr. Blackburn if they might have lodging for the night, in payment for which they would give him all the ducks he could eat.

Seeing they were gentlemen, Mr. Blackburn said he would gladly have them as guests until the next morning, but that they could keep their ducks as he had just received a pair as a present. As he made this remark, a peculiar smile flitted over his face. The hunters then asked if he would tell them if he had received the ducks within the last hour, and added:

"If you did, we think by rights they were the ducks we shot and which were stolen from us."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Mr. Blackburn, trying to look surprised.

"Would you mind telling us if the fellow who gave the ducks to you had a little, yellow dog with him?"

"I don't know about the fellow, but I do about the dog. It was a little, yellow dog that brought them to me, one at a time."

Then he told them about the rats and how he thought Stubby had stolen the ducks to prove that he was as smart as Button.

The gentlemen agreed that he was, and expressed a desire to see him. As they spoke, Stubby, not knowing they were there, came running toward the house from the stable.

"There he comes now!" said Mr. Blackburn, pointing at Stubby. "You see he is still wet from his swim in the lake after your ducks."

As they spoke, the spaniel gave a growl which meant, "There comes the dog that stole our ducks!" This was enough for the pointer and setter and with one accord they set on Stubby. He certainly would have had a sorry time of it had not the hunters called off the attacking dogs.

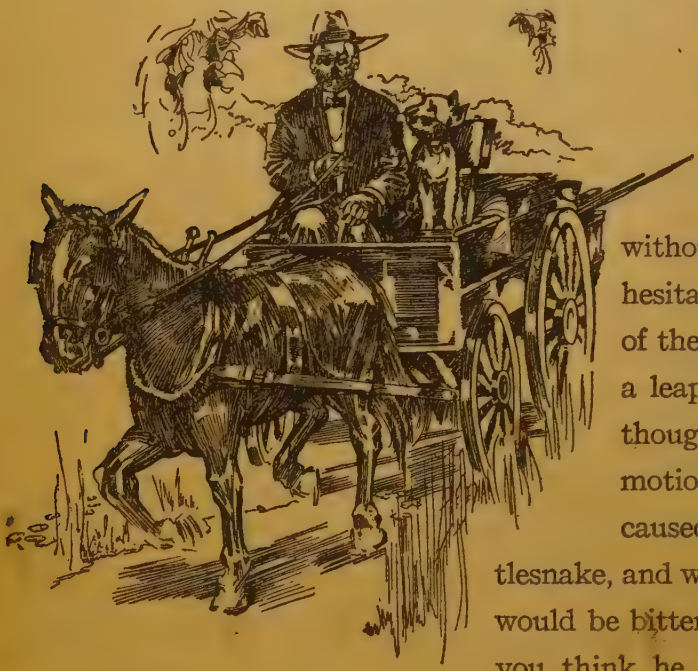
"You see," explained Mr. Blackburn, "your dogs evidently recognize him as the culprit."

"I suppose they do, for I called them off and would not let them touch him when he was sitting before that hollow log in which in all probability he had hidden his ducks when he heard us coming," said one of the gentlemen. "That dog certainly has brains. I have taken a great fancy to him, and if you would care to part with him, I will give a good price."

"Thank you, no! I don't care to sell him. For though I have had him only a day or two, I have become very much attached to him. He is always doing bright things, and will be a great deal of

company for me on my lonely rides. His eyes are sharper than steel points, and he sees everything.

"This afternoon as I was driving along, I noticed a peculiar waving motion in the grass beside the road. Evidently Stubby saw it at the same time, for he cocked up one ear as if listening, then without a moment's hesitation jumped out of the buggy and made a leap for the spot. I thought that likely the motion of the grass was caused by some big rattlesnake, and was afraid Stubby would be bitten. But what do you think he found but a big woods turtle, which he brought to me, carrying it by its little, slippery tail. I must add that when he deposited it at the side of the buggy he still held the tail in his mouth, as he had bitten it clear off. The tail was so small and the turtle so big that in order not to have it



slip through his teeth, he had to bite so hard he had cut clear through. He seemed so pleased and looked as if he had done me such a favor that I got out and examined the turtle. And when I turned it over to look at the under shell, as I do every turtle I come across when walking in the fields or woods, what do you think I saw but my own initials, carved by my own hand on that very turtle fifteen years ago. At that time I had the habit of carving my initials and the date on every turtle I found.

"Perhaps you gentlemen don't know that these apparently slowly moving turtles travel many, many miles in the course of a year. I have found them long distances from where I first saw them a few months before. You see by carving my initials and the date on them, I was able to tell to a day how long the time had been since first I saw them. And often and often I would come across the same turtle many times in my walks. When I did, I always added that date to the previous ones.

"If it will not bore you, I will tell you the experience I had with an old turtle—the largest of this woods species I ever saw."

The gentlemen assured him they would be delighted to hear it and he proceeded:

"I first found him under my tomato vines. For some time I had been terribly bothered by something eating holes in my largest and ripest tomatoes. At first I thought it must be the birds or

chickens, and I had bells put on the vines to frighten them away when they lit on the vines. But it was no use; the tomatoes went just the same. And the aggravating part of it was that it was always my very best tomatoes that were taken—the ones I was leaving for just one more day's ripening.

"This went on until I became thoroughly exasperated, when one morning as I was going into the garden earlier than usual, I spied this turtle quietly feasting on my biggest, reddest and ripest tomato. Yes, I caught the culprit in the very act of biting a piece right out of the middle of it. When I came up, it tried to crawl under the plant and hide, but I fished him out and gave him a rap on the shell that made him draw in all four legs and tail in a hurry. When they were in, I cut my initials on his under shell and then took him and put him in the bottom of my buggy, preparatory to carrying him a long way off and leaving him in some woods, far enough away from all gardens to make it impossible for him to get into them and do any harm.

"But I had counted on Mr. Turtle being as stupid as he looked, which he was not, for when I went to get him from under the seat when about ten miles from home, no turtle was there. I did not know whether I had jolted him out as I drove along, or whether he had deliberately crawled to the edge of the buggy and dropped himself over. Had he done the latter, he must have taken a great

chance with his life, as the fall from the high buggy was enough to crack his shell did he happen to land on a stone. At any rate, the turtle was gone, and I gave him no more thought, especially as my tomatoes were let alone for several days.

"When walking one day in the woods about half a mile from my house, I stumbled over something in the path which I took to be a stone among the dead leaves. But when it began to move, I saw it was a turtle. True to my habit of looking at all turtles, I picked this one up and found he was my old enemy, the tomato thief. So I carved the date in his shell and carried him along with me until I crossed a stream, then set him down and watched to see if he would attempt to swim across and come to my tomatoes, or if my finding him would frighten him away.

"To make a long story short, he was not frightened in the least and, as if to defy me, he appeared three days afterward in my garden, not alone, but with two other turtles, one of which I took to be his mate and the other, being much smaller, I think was one of his sons. Well, if you will believe me, that old turtle defied me and no matter how often I carried him out of my garden, he always came back.

"But one day I got really angry at him and picked him up and put him in the swill barrel to fatten, preparatory to making him up into turtle soup."

"You don't mean to tell me," said one of the hunters, "that common, everyday woods and water turtles are good to eat?"

"Certainly, and though their meat may not be as tasty as the tortoise, still they have as many kinds within their shells as the big ocean turtles have. You have read, I suppose, that the meat of turtles consists of fish, flesh and fowl? At any rate, we made that old turtle up into soup and it was fine, I can tell you, for the white meat was as white and juicy as that of a chicken."

Ding-a-ling-ling!

"There goes the bell, which means we must turn our attention from turtles to ducks."

CHAPTER V

THE KIDNAPERS ON BILLY'S TRAIL

WHILE Stubby and Button were enjoying their duck dinner and picking the bones, Billy was having an equally good time, for he had found another old friend of long standing, being no other than Bettina, the little burro whom he used to travel with in the circus.

Billy was standing in the cowyard talking to the Widow Brown when he heard a loud heehaw! heehaw! heehaw!

"Well, if there isn't Bettina," exclaimed the Widow. "You must come and meet her, for she is one of my dearest friends, and I know you will like her for she is so sweet and entertaining, having traveled so much and had so many wonderful experiences. Some of the most interesting things happened to her when she was with a circus. And, by the way, these things happened to her with a big Billy goat of whom she is never tired of talking. In her eyes he was the most clever and courageous goat that ever breathed the

breath of life and as handsome as a picture. She will sigh when talking of him, and say: 'Oh, could I only meet him again and have a five minute talk with him I could die happy!'"

"What did you say her name was, and how does she look?"

"Her name is Bettina, and she is the smallest burro for her age anyone ever saw. She is not as large as a six-months-old calf. Besides, she has the prettiest, longest ears that ever grew on any burro or donkey, I am sure. But with it all, she has the sweetest face and the biggest, round, dark eyes you ever looked into. Come on and I will introduce you to her. She has come to call on me. She lives on the next farm and often crawls through the fences and runs away to come over for a chat with me."

"Heehaw! Heehaw! Heehaw!" again rang out on the air.

"Baa, baa, baa!" answered back the Widow Brown.

"My, that sounds familiar!" said Billy. "Did you say she used to be in a circus and that she has immense ears and large, dark eyes?"

"Yes," replied the Widow.

"Well, then, from the sound of that voice and your description, I believe she is none other than my old chum in the circus, and that I am the very Billy she has been talking to you about. For we certainly did have exciting times when traveling with that show."

"Billy Whiskers! Billy Whiskers! My long lost friend!" ex-

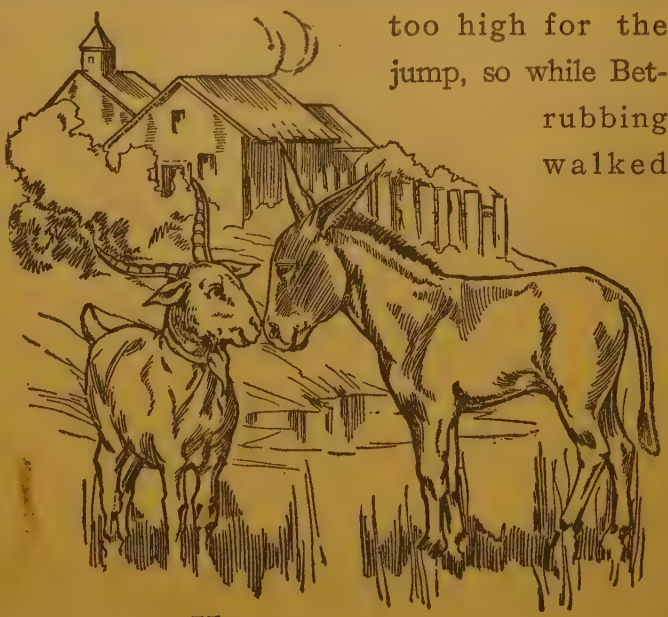
claimed Bettina the minute Billy and the Widow came into sight. "Where in the world did you come from? I am too glad for words to see you again. Come close to the fence so I can take a good look at you!"

"Wait, and I'll come outside to you," proposed Billy, "so I can rub noses with you, for after such a long parting as we have had, I must have a kiss."

"I see you are the same gallant Billy as ever."

And as she spoke, Billy jumped the fence, not taking the trouble to go over to the hole he had crawled through when he entered.

The fence was too high for the Widow Brown to jump, so while Bettina and Billy were rubbing noses, she quietly walked around to where they stood.



Such baahing, bleating and hee-hawing as went on for the next half hour you never heard, as these friends talked over

old times and also discussed at some length their plans for the future.

"But, Billy, how in the world did you ever happen to come here?" asked Betty.

Then Billy told her all about the kidnapers.

"Kidnapers! Why, mercy, goodness me!" exclaimed Bettina. "How lucky I came just as I did. I have just passed two Italian men in the meadow. They were both talking and gesticulating. Being strangers to me, they excited my curiosity and I grazed along near them so I could hear what they said, for I felt they were up to mischief of some kind. They are the most disagreeable looking pair of tramps I have seen in a long while. They were talking about some goat that had gotten away from them and what a lot of money they would lose if they did not find him. But I thought it was some person they were talking about and were calling him a goat because they were angry that he had escaped from them. Had I known it was you, I would have given them both a sly kick."

"I know you would, Bettina, for you always stand up for a friend," said Billy. "About how far from here are they, and do you think they are headed for here?"

"Yes, I do, for one said to the other: 'If he is anywhere about, he'd naturally go to the nearest farmyard for company. We will go and look and if we don't find him, we can at least ask for something

to eat and drink. Gee, but I am so mad at that goat for escaping us that I feel like punching the life out of him when we catch him!"

"'Be careful, Tom,' said his companion, 'how you vent your spleen on a Billy goat. If you don't, you may find yourself being butted over the moon.'"

"Listen," said Billy. "I think I hear voices!"

Bettina and the Widow Brown looked sober and strained their ears to hear.

"Yes, I *do* hear voices, and it is the voices of the men I saw in the meadow," said Bettina.

"They are also the voices of my kidnapers."

"Oh, whatever will we do?" exclaimed the Widow Brown in a worried, frightened voice.

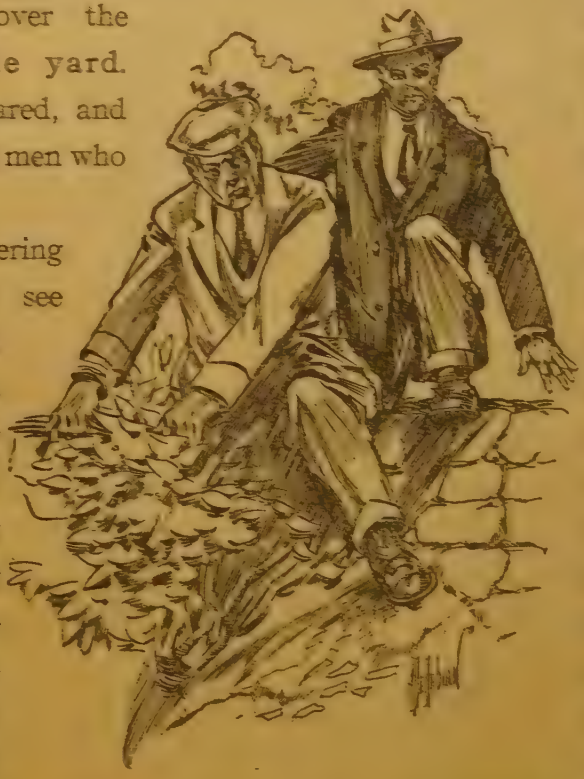
"Stand still and butt them over the moon, as one of them said I might. I can manage them both easily enough if they don't have a lasso to throw over my head."

"Don't stay here and take any chances, Billy. Run and hide!" said the Widow Brown, "and I will stay here and listen to what they say and then tell you their plans."

Billy ran across the cowyard to some steps that led into a hay-loft. Up these he climbed and was about to hide in the hay, when he saw the light streaming through a crack between the boards in the side of the stable overlooking the cowyard. He walked over

to this and, putting one eye to the crack, found he could see all that went on in the yard beneath him.

Just as he put his eye to the crack, he saw the head of a man looking over the stone wall of the stable yard. Then another head appeared, and he recognized both as the men who had kidnaped him.



After peering cautiously around to see that no one was in sight, the men drew themselves up on the wall and quietly dropped over. As they let themselves down, Billy heard a dog barking furiously outside the stable door. The kidnapers heard it also, and, dreading the dogs—as all thieves and kidnapers do—they ran for the very steps Billy had climbed but a minute before. They thought the loft a good place to hide from the dog. Billy, seeing them coming, left the crack and gave one

bound up on to the hay and then down into a deep hole he saw over in the corner. Once there, he tried to hold his breath so the kidnapers could not hear him breathe and also so he could hear into what part of the loft they went to hide.

"Sh—sh!" whispered one kidnaper to the other. "Have you got your dagger handy? If you have, just stick it into the dog if he tries to follow us."

"Bow-wow-wow!" barked the dog, but instead of coming nearer, he went in the other direction.

Billy recognized the bark as belonging to Stubby and heaved a sigh of relief (regardless of his fear of being heard by the kidnapers) to find that Stubby was chasing a cat and not the kidnapers. They evidently were relieved, too, for they began to talk in low tones and discussed whether they should stay hid until everyone had gone to bed, or if they would walk boldly up to the house and ask for something to eat. They at last decided to go to the house, especially as they had seen Mr. Blackburn drive off, accompanied by the two hunters, with Stubby sitting up on the front seat, while the hunting dogs followed.

"Now is our time, Sam, while the old man and his dog are gone for us to go and strike the old woman for a meal."

Billy heard them creep out of the hay, and, looking through the crack, saw them approach the farmhouse and soon come out each

with a plate in one hand and a cup in the other. And it was not hard for Billy to imagine that Mrs. Blackburn had given them a heaped-up plate of meat, potatoes and gravy, with a cup of coffee to wash it down. She had the reputation of feeding all tramps, beggars or peddlers who asked her for a bite. No one was ever turned away from her door hungry.

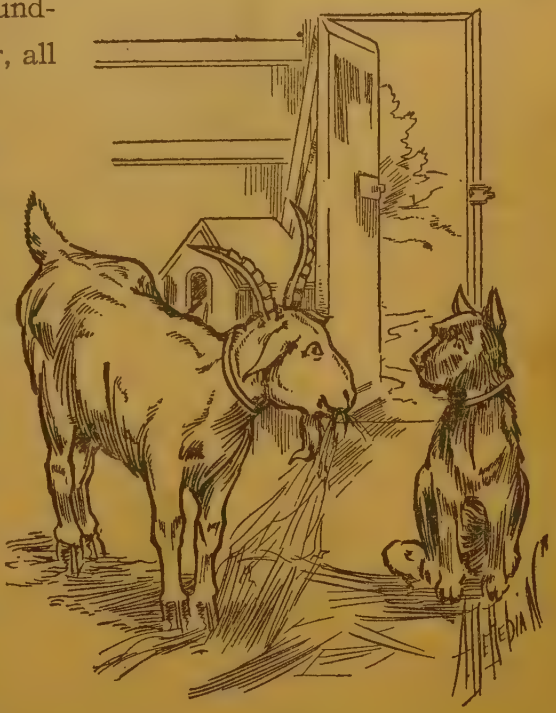
"Now is my chance to escape," thought Billy. "I'll go down, bid the Widow Brown and Bettina good-bye and get the Widow Brown to tell Button and Stubby where I have gone, so they can follow."

He went down, and whether it was the Widow Brown or Bettina that was so entertaining that he lost sight of the time, or whether they were afraid Mr. Blackburn would return and find them there, Billy never could tell. All he knew was that a rooster crowed to tell him that the kidnapers were coming back to the barn, so he cut his sentence short and ran up into the hay loft again and hid in the same place in the corner, from which he could see through a knot-hole and crack the farmhouse and a good bit of the road that led to the town. As he looked, he saw the rooster had been mistaken and that the kidnapers, instead of coming to the barn, had taken the road to town. Billy watched them until they were out of sight, then he came out of his hiding-place once more and went down to his friends.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

"Gracious! Wouldn't they be angry if they knew how near you were to them and they never discovered it?" asked Bettina.

The three were standing around a pile of fresh green grass the hired man had just thrown into the stable yard for the horses and cows, when Stubby came bounding through the stable door, all bristling with excitement.



"Billy! Billy! Whom do you think I have just seen?"

"The kidnapers," replied Billy, showing not the least excitement.

"Well, I must say you take the news pretty coolly," said Stubby, sitting down on his tail.

"Oh, come, Stub, I saw them before you did!

"Oh, I see why you are taking it so calmly. You think I am only joking with you, but, no joking, I really did see them on the road coming this way from town!"

"You mean you were coming from town and they were going there ——"

"I mean nothing of the sort! I mean just what I say, that they are coming in this direction and are probably pretty near here by this time."

"That is certainly strange, for it was not half an hour ago that I saw them well on their way to town."

"You saw them!" exclaimed Stubby. "Then you must have been down the road."

"No, I have not left this stable yard."

"Oh, quit your fooling and talk sense! How could you stay here and still see two men on the road half a mile from here?"

"Well, I did, and when I explain to you, you will see how easy it was. While you were at the house eating duck, Bettina here told us she saw two tramps in the meadow. I knew instantly they must be our kidnapers. Then when Bettina repeated to me what she had heard them say, I knew for sure they were the kidnapers and that they would soon appear and find me, so I hid in the hay-mow. While I was hiding from them, you saw fit to bark your head off as you came running toward the stable. The men, hearing you, thought you had seen or smelt them and that you were on their trail, so they too hid in the hay loft where I was. I kept still and listened to their conversation until they climbed down and went to

the house to get something to eat. From a crack in the barn I watched them and saw that after their meal they took the road to town. I continued to watch them from my hiding-place away up in the loft until they disappeared from sight, half a mile down the road. So that is why I asked you if it was not a slip of the tongue when you said they were coming this way, as it has been scarcely half an hour since I saw them going in that direction."

"Well, then they must have changed their minds, and are coming back, for when I saw them they were walking in this direction, and walking pretty fast for tramps, at that."

"Hark!" said Billy, and all ears went up in a listening position, even to Bettina's long ones.

"I hear footsteps," said Billy.

"And I voices," said Bettina.

"And they are coming this way," said the Widow Brown.

"We'd better skidoo," said Stubby.

Bettina slipped through the hole in the fence and ran for home.

The Widow Brown continued to eat as if nothing was wrong; while Billy once more climbed to his hiding-place in the loft and Stubby ran to the stable door to see who was coming. As he expected, it was the kidnapers. They did not try to enter the stable by the door, but went around and climbed over the wall at the same place they had before and immediately went to the haymow. This

move astonished the Widow Brown, Billy and Stubby very much. What did they mean by coming back? Some mischief, that was plain to be seen, or they would not sneak in the back way and hide in the loft.

CHAPTER VI

THE KIDNAPERS' PLANS

ILLY, nicely hidden in his corner, listened with both ears to all the kidnapers were saying and he soon found out something that surprised him very much. It was this. The kidnapers had seen Bettina when they went through the yard the first time and, on talking it over, they had decided that being so little and having such extra large eyes and tremendous ears, she would be fine for a circus, if trained a little, and as they could not find Billy, they had come back to steal her.

"Oh, ho! So that is your game, is it?" thought Billy. "Well, I hope Bettina has not forgotten how to kick and that she gives you one of her high ones when you go to catch her. Little do you think that she is already a trained circus burro. Your conversation proves that you do not know I am on this farm, and you only chanced this way. I'll have some fun tonight. It is bright moonlight, and when it shines in at the little left window, throwing a path of light across the hay and leaving all the rest of the loft in

total darkness, I will slowly rise up out of the depths of the hay, stand on my hind legs and walk slowly toward you. Seeing my long, white beard, horns, and cloven feet, you will be scared, especially when I say 'Baa! Baa! Baa!' slowly, and you'll fall over yourselves in your hurry to get out of the loft, and I would be willing to bet that all thoughts of stealing Bettina will be frightened out of your minds and that you will never stop running until well on your way."

While Billy was thinking and planning what he would do when the moon came up, Stubby had run to the house and was trying in every way he knew to tell Mr. Blackburn that there were kidnapers in the loft. He ran up to Mr. Blackburn, barked, then ran toward the stable, barking as if asking him to follow. When he did not do so, he took hold of the bottom of his trousers and tried to pull him along.

"Doggie, what is the matter with you? Are you crazy? Let go my trouser leg, you rascal, or you'll tear it! Come into the house and lie down by the stove. I want to read," and Mr. Blackburn went into the house, calling Stubby after him, and shut the door.

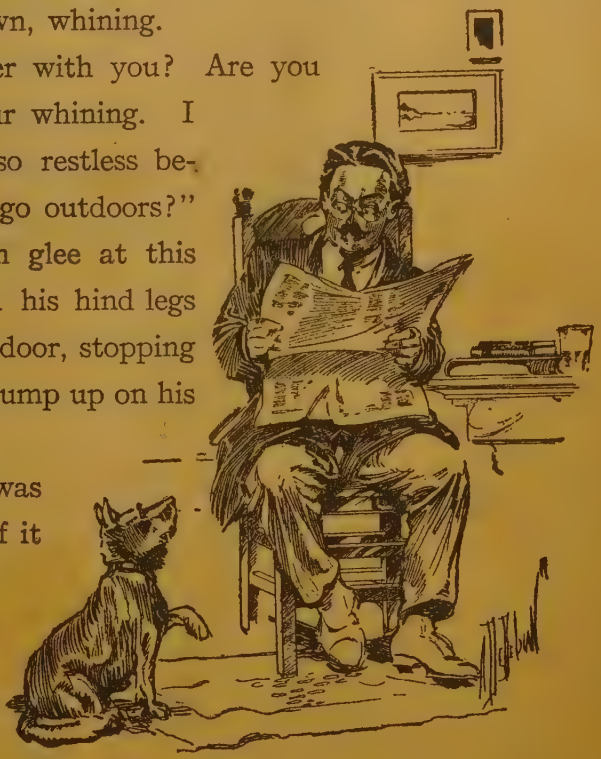
Poor Stubby! There he was, shut in, and how he worried all night for fear Billy would be stolen and carried away and he would not know where the kidnapers had taken him! When the moon

"Somebody get some water while I chafe his hands!"

came up, he jumped up on a chair by the window that faced the stable, and tried to see what was going on outside. But he could not, and he jumped down, whining.

"What is the matter with you? Are you sick? If not, stop your whining. I never knew you to be so restless before. Do you want to go outdoors?"

Stubby barked with glee at this question, and stood on his hind legs and walked toward the door, stopping every now and then to jump up on his master to thank him.

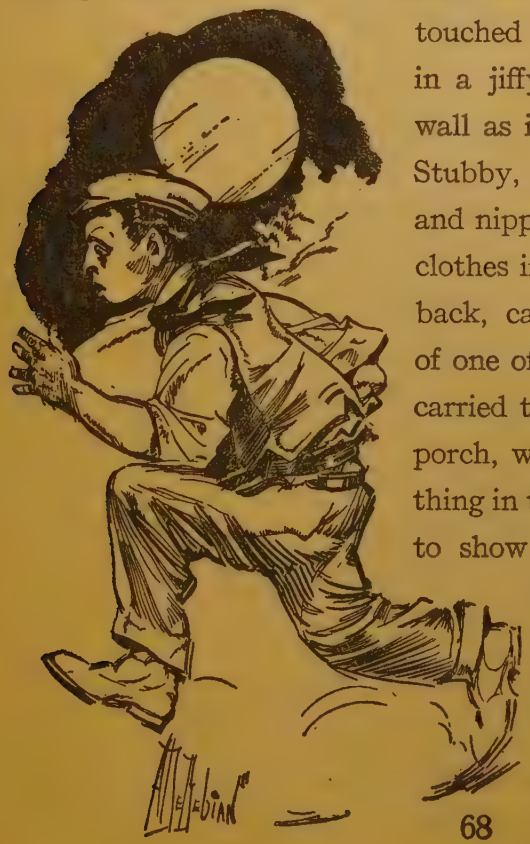


The second the door was open, Stubby was out of it like an arrow from its bow, and away he ran, straight to the stable.

"I would like to know," said Mr. Blackburn, "what makes that dog so crazy to get out to the stable tonight."

The front door of the stable was locked for the night, so Stubby had to run around to the back and go in through the hole in the

wall which the Widow Brown had showed them. Just as he ran through he saw a pair of legs drop through the hole in the loft, quickly followed by a whole body, and the second the figure touched the floor, it started on a dead run for the stone wall, over which it threw itself in a hurry. While this man was running, another came rolling down from the loft head over heels, and he, too, when he touched the floor, picked himself up in a jiffy and threw himself over the wall as if pursued by the Evil One. Stubby, on seeing all this, gave chase and nipped at their heels and tore their clothes into ribbons. At last he came back, carrying in his mouth the seat of one of the men's trousers. This he carried to the house and laid it on the porch, where he could find it the first thing in the morning, for he was bound to show it to Mr. Blackburn so he would know the reason of his barking. Just then the thought struck Stubby: What if he should think it was only a rag and not the



seat out of a pair of trousers? If so, all his efforts would be in vain.

"If he does," said Stubby, "I'll coax him to the stable yard and show him the men's tracks."

The kidnapers hurried on toward town, cursing at Stubby as they went, and vowing they would poison him if they ever had the chance.

"Tom," said Sam, "that figure we saw in the loft must have been the Old Man of the Woods. Did you ever see such blazin' eyes and long beard before?"

"I guess instead it must have been a crazy man escaped from an asylum, but just the same, whoever he was, I wasn't goin' to stay around there and have my throat cut by some old lunatic."

"I would just like to know where that blamed old goat is, anyway. I'm tired lookin' fer him," said Sam in disgust.

"Tired, are you?" remarked Tom. "I'm knock-kneed, hump-backed, squint-eyed and bald-headed from tryin' to get on his trail. Knock-kneed from walking so many miles; hump-backed from crawling and sleeping under fences; bald-headed from rubbing my head so much to see if I could not rub an idea out of it as to where to look for him; and squint-eyed from looking in every corner in which a goat could possibly hide. Speakin' of hide, I'd like to hide him when I get him for givin' us the slip."

"If he'd stayed in that car," said Sam, "by now we would have been walkin' on velvet, wearin' silk, drinkin' ice cream sodas, and smokin' twenty-five cent cigars with the money we'd got out of selling him. Darn him! I'll pull every hair out of his long beard when we do catch him."

And thus the two kidnapers talked and growled as they made their way to town.

"Where shall we look for him next?" asked Sam.

"I think," replied Tom, "that we'd better go back to the railroad and inspect the farms that lie adjoining. I think he'd be more likely to stay on one of them than to wander as far as the farm we've just come from."

"I know that," said Sam, "but why we went so far this time was because we were following the tracks of an extra big goat that started at the railroad, then through a clover field and across lots until they got to the farm we've just left. Yes, and it's my opinion

that he may be there now for all we know. If we hadn't been such big chumps, we'd a stayed there and not run off all on account of seein' a crazy man in the moonlight. There were two of us, and we should have stayed and knocked his old head off, so we should!"

"Oh, yes, you're mighty brave now you're two miles away from him," replied Tom in a sarcastic tone.

"Gee, what's that?" and Sam jumped to the middle of the road as if he had been shot, for he had heard a queer noise in the bushes beside the road, and he thought the crazy man was still after him. But the noise turned out to be only a horse in the bushes that had happened to sneeze.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Sam. We'll go to town, beg some old clothes from the people in the suburbs, beg something to eat, and then hike it for the railroad. And we will begin once again to hunt for that goat, and I'm not goin' to give up until I find him if I drop dead hunting for him. Are ye with me, Sam?"

"I am!"

"Well, here's my paw on it then."

And the two kidnapers shook hands and swore by the light of the moon never to give up the hunt until they found Billy.

"Billy," said the Widow Brown, "I must tell you what a crow told me today. It was this: that he knew where you lived and that he could tell you how to find your way home across country, which

would be much shorter than if you followed the railroad. He also said that all your family are well, and that the twins are as mischievous and cunning as ever."

"Tell me," broke in Billy, "what did he say of Nannie?"

"He said she was well, but looking worried, as she always does when you are away, and that she called him to her and asked him if he would keep an eye out for you, and that if he saw you, he was to give you her love and tell you to try to hurry home. She said she had not slept a wink since you left for looking for you. Every night she climbs to the top of the straw stack, because it's the highest thing she can find, where she can get a view of the surrounding country, to watch for you, hoping she will see you coming in the distance and run to meet you."

"Dear, sweet, little Nannie!" said Billy in a lonely tone, "she is the truest, sweetest little wife in the country, and I'm going to start for home this very night. If you will kindly give me the directions the crow gave you for me to follow, I will start. It is pleasant here, and I like Mr. Blackburn very much, and no one could find a nicer farm to live on, or a kinder master, but my first duty is to my wife and family, and I must get to them as soon as I can. I hate to hurry Stubby and Button away, for they both seem so happy here, as Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn are more than kind to them and show them more attention and pet them more than Mr.

and Mrs. Watson do. So I'll tell you what I'm going to do—steal away tonight and not let them know I'm going, and not knowing in what direction I go, they won't be able to trace me and maybe they will give up the hunt. If so, I will come back and visit you all some time and bring Nannie. I shall know the way back if once I succeed in finding my way home. Now if you'll repeat to me exactly what the crow said, I will try to follow his instructions."

"He said for you to take the road that leads to the village and keep on it until you come to the big, red brick hotel in the center of the town; then turn to your left and keep on until you come to the railroad tracks; cross them and go down the hill on the other side until you come to the river; then follow it through pastures, woods and dales until it forms two forks with an island at the junction; then you are to take the smaller, left-hand branch and follow near it, never leaving it, and it will lead you right to your own meadow, as it flows through it. It is such a short cut that it would take only a couple of days to make the trip if you travel steadily and don't loiter on the way. By following the stream you will have food and water all the time, which is a great help as it will save you the bother of looking for a drink in a part of the country where you don't know where the springs and brooks are. Now do you think you can remember the directions?"

"Yes, certainly! They are quite easy. And, do you know, I

think I will start right now! The moon is up, which will make it easier traveling now than later, and, besides, neither Stubby nor Button are around for me to dodge, and if I stay until morning, I might have to wait hours for a chance to escape them both."

"Must you go so soon?" exclaimed the Widow Brown in a woe-begone voice.

"Yes, I think I must. But if, as the crow says, it is only about a two days' trip from the village to our farm and it does not take long to come from the village here, we will run over often and you can go back with us for a visit."

"Oh, that will be delightful! I am crazy to see your grandchildren, the twins. I heard the little girl looks like your wife, but that the little boy looks like his handsome grandfather."

"Your flattery is charming, and I would take off my hat to you were I a man, but being only a goat, I can show my appreciation by pulling my beard."

"Listen," said the Widow Brown, "I thought I heard Stubby the other side of the barn barking."

"If that is so, I must skidoo before he comes around here. Good-bye, good-bye, but only for a short time!"

And Billy jumped the stone wall surrounding the stable yard just as Stubby's nose appeared peeping through the straw that hid the hole in the fence.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

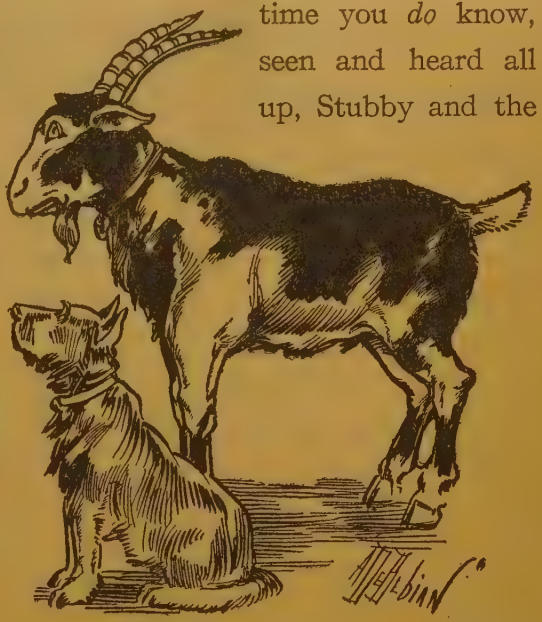
"Where's Billy?" was the first question Stubby asked.

"How should I know?" replied the Widow Brown.

"Who better?" said Stubby.

"Am I his keeper?"

"No," replied a voice from overhead that seemed to come from the clouds, "but this the time you *do* know, for from my perch I have seen and heard all that went on," and, looking up, Stubby and the Widow Brown saw Button comfortably perched on a rafter of the hay loft directly over their heads.



"I'll tell you more, Stubby. Billy has given us the slip, or so he supposes, because he didn't want to tear us away from such a good home. And this lady here helped him off by giving him the exact directions which were given to her by a gossipy old crow. You see, Widow Brown, I have used my ears well and have heard all of your conversation."

"Oh, you sneaky old cat, you!" exclaimed the Widow with a laugh.

"Sneaky? Not at all! I couldn't help overhearing your conversation when you came and sat directly under me where I was watching to catch a rat."

"Well, it is my opinion," said Stubby, "that we'd better get out of here and follow Billy before he is out of sight, or we will have as hard a time finding him as the kidnapers are having."

"Don't be in a hurry or get excited, Stubby, for I know every step of the way he is to go. You forget that I heard the Widow give him the directions, so now we can follow him at our leisure."

"Yes," said Stubby, "and won't it be fun to let him think that he has given us the slip and then suddenly appear before him when he thinks we surely have not followed him?"

"He is just disappearing in the woods that borders the road to the village," said Button. "From my perch I can see his white sides gleaming in the moonlight against the dark green of the woods."

CHAPTER VII

BILLY GIVES HIS CHUMS THE SLIP

HELLO, boys! Where are you going?" brayed Bettina as she saw Stubby and Button coming out of the stable-yard just as she was about to enter, having come over for a morning chat with Billy and the rest of them.

"Why, hello, Bettina! How are you this morning?" exclaimed Stubby.

"Fine, finer than silk."

"And you look it," said Button.

"Where were you two going in such a hurry?"

"To follow Billy."

"Where has he gone, I would like to know?"

"Well, you see, Bettina," said Stubby, "he tried to give us the slip last night, but as we knew where he was going, we let him go. But today we're going to follow him and show him he is not so smart as he thought."

"Billy gone? Tried to give you the slip? I can't believe it. You all seemed to be such good friends."

"So we are still!" declared Button very enthusiastically. "If you are, that is a queer way to treat you."

"That all depends on how you look at it," said Stubby. "In this case it was not because he did not care for us and was trying to give us the slip, but because he cared so much he hated to do something he thought would cause us sorrow."

"Well, for mercy sakes, explain it to me, and don't keep me in suspense by beating around the bush."

"It's this way," said Button. "Billy got a message from Nannie, brought by an old crow, who left directions with the Widow Brown just how to find the way home. Of course he was crazy to see Nannie. He also knew that Stubby and I liked it better here than any place we have ever lived. Still he knew if he told us he was going, we would go with him, so he thought he would give us the slip, and, not knowing where he had gone, we could not follow him."

"You see," said Stubby, "that Billy is so unselfish where his friends are concerned that though he was anxious for us to go with him, he would not ask us to leave a good home, not knowing what hardships and dangers we would have to encounter before reaching his old home. You see, when he reaches his journey's end, he will find a loving wife and children, while we two old bachelors would find no one who is over interested in us."

"Oh, I see!" said Bettina.

"No, you don't! You hear," said Button, ready for fun.

"None of your far-fetched jokes this morning," said Stubby.

"That is just like Billy," said Bettina. "He always was a big hearted fellow. So you're going to follow him, are you?"

"Yes," answered Stubby. "We have decided to see him safely home. Then we're coming back here to live. The crow said it was only a two days' journey from here."

"If that's your plan, I am with you," said Bettina. "That is, if you will let me accompany you."

"Let you!" exclaimed both Stubby and Button in one breath. "We would be charmed to have you."

"You see," said Bettina, "I met Nannie, his wife, and Billy Junior and also Billy's daughter, Day, years ago when we were in the circus and I should like nothing better than to renew the acquaintance and accept their long-standing invitation to visit them whenever I could, wherever they were. Nannie used to be a beautiful goat—the most beautiful I have ever seen, and I have seen many. My master is away for a couple of weeks, and we are supposed to be turned loose in the pasture, so the hired man will never miss me. When do you start?"

"Now! This very minute if you are ready!" said Stubby.

"Isn't it fun not to have to carry satchels, look after baggage and buy tickets?" said Button.

"Yes," answered Bettina, "and get all tired out dressmaking, packing and fussing before one starts. My hair brush is any good stiff-limbed bush by the roadside I can walk under or rub against to rub the dust out of my hair after my morning roll in the sand. This roll is just as good and as cleansing as a lady's dry shampoo."

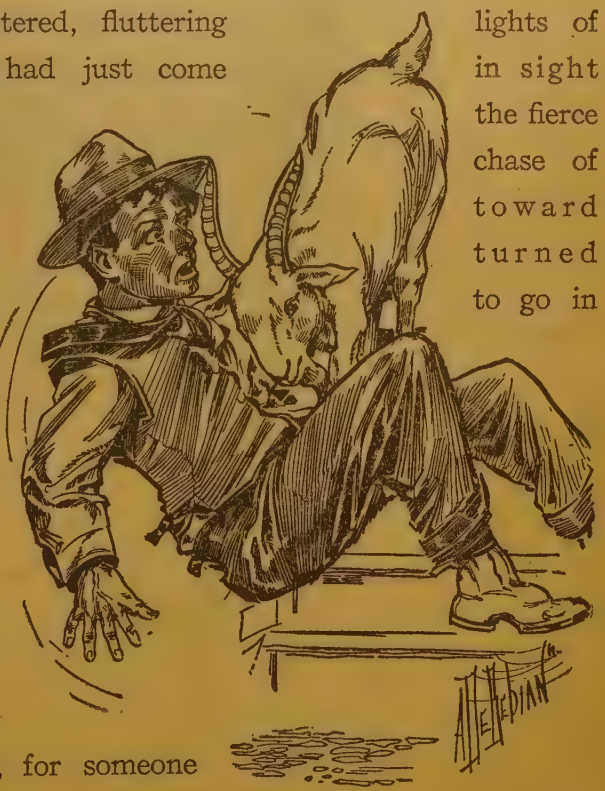
"As for me," said Button, "I always carry my wash-basin with me—my mouth and tongue. So does Stubby, for that matter, and we both occasionally take a sand bath and roll in the grass to brush ourselves off."

"Listen!" said Stubby. "I thought I heard someone whistling. If so, we must be off, for I don't want Mr. Blackburn or his man to see us go. Button and I have just come from the house where we were bidding Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn good-bye, but they did not know it."

"Here comes the hired man. Let's run!" proposed Button, and away through the field ran the three in the direction of the woods that Billy was seen to enter by moonlight the night before.

We will leave the three friends following Billy's trail to see if anything happened to Billy after he disappeared from sight in the woods. For a wonder, nothing did. Neither did he lose his way nor get into any mischief, but he pressed on in a straight line, just as the crow had said, until he came out on the road that led to the

village. Once on this, he made good time, and as it was still bright moonlight, he trotted along just as fast as he could go, never stopping to nibble grass or steal turnips or lettuce from any truck patch he passed. The few scattered, fluttering lights of the village lamp-posts had just come in sight when Billy heard the fierce barking of dogs as if in chase of something. They came toward him for a while, then turned suddenly and seemed to go in the opposite direction when Bang! Bang! Bang! rang out three shots on the still night air.



"Ho, ho!" thought Billy. "Someone has discovered burglars, I guess. Think I'll hurry along and see the fun, for someone must be on their trail."

Imagine his surprise, on entering an alley, to see running at full speed toward him, and chased by a man and three dogs, one of

his kidnapers! Billy jumped into a dark doorway, for fear the man might shoot and accidentally hit him.

And it was a good thing he did, for whizz! went a bullet and bang! went the sound as it hit and entered an old barrel just back of where Billy had been standing.

The kidnaper, now a burglar as well, came panting on, the bullet having missed him. Seeing the dark doorway, he dodged in, expecting to hide in the stable or run through it and out the opposite door, thus throwing his pursuers off the track, but plung! went something hard against his stomach, and he was thrown back into the alley as if shot from a cannon, and left sprawling on his back. Before he could get up, the whole pack of dogs was upon him, and he would have been torn to pieces had not the man with the gun driven them off.

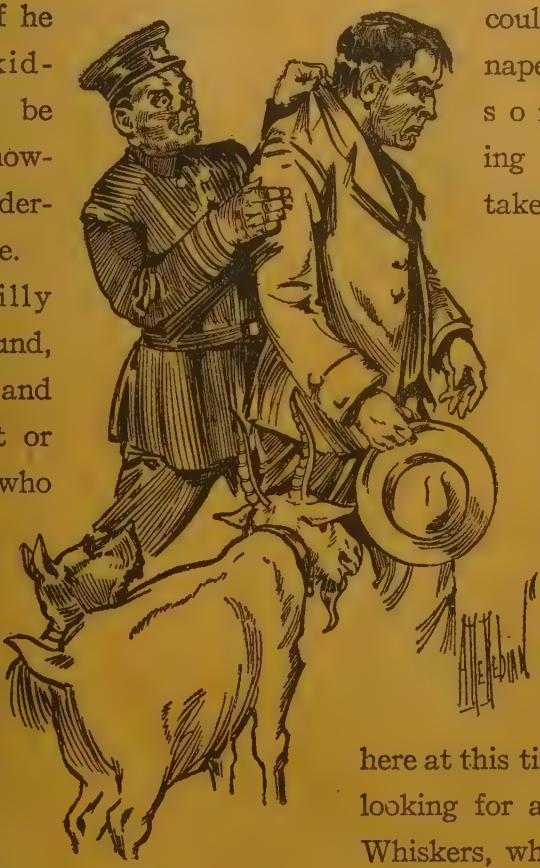
At this critical moment the police came hurrying into the alley, having heard the shots, and soon they were carrying the mussed up kidnaper off with them in the patrol-wagon. Just before they had lifted him from the ground, his eye happened to wander in the direction of the door, from which he had been so rudely expelled, and there he saw the same blazing eyes and long bearded face he had seen in the hay loft.

With a shudder, he exclaimed: "The Old Man of the Woods!" and let the police carry him off without any resistance.

Billy came in only a few paces behind Bettina, baaing his displeasure at the whole performance.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

When they had disappeared, Billy quietly walked out and down the alley, looking in every barrel, ash-can and packing box he could find to see if he could not discover the other kidnaper, as he was sure he must be somewhere around, well knowing one of them would not undertake a robbery of any kind alone.



While Billy was sniffing and nosing around, keeping his bright eyes and acute ears open for sight or sound of the other man, who should he see enter the alley but Stubby, Button and Bettina!

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "By all that's wonderful, how did you three happen to be here at this time of night?"

"We're looking for a goat by the name of Billy Whiskers, who gave us the slip last night," explained Stubby.

"Have you seen anything of a poor, thin, skinny, lop-eared

goat? for if you have, he's the one we're looking for," said Button.

"Yes," answered Billy, entering into the fun. "I just saw a goat answering that description talking to three donkeys—two little ones and a big one. If you follow your noses, you will run into him pretty quick, as I saw him just as you three came up."

"Oh, if that's the case," said Stubby, "we can soon catch up to him, so we will stay and have a little talk with you."

"Oh, no, you won't stop and talk to me now, for I am out on important, hurry-up business. But I would like you to come and help me if you will."

"What are you up to now?" asked Button.

"I am on the trail of the kidnapers—have just butted one into a state of collapse and seen him carried off in the patrol-wagon, and now am after the second who can't be far off."

"Oh, I see! You want us to help you try to find him," said Button.

"Look out he don't find you first and capture you again," warned Bettina.

"No danger of that now," said Billy. "He is afraid of his life to show his face, for he has been trying to rob a house," and Billy told them all about the commotion there had been just before they came.

"I'll tell you how we can find him," said Button. "Stubby

can sniff around and try to find his tracks, while I will run along the top of the fences, peering into every chicken coop, dark corner and shed as I go along, and Billy and Bettina may stand outside ready to butt or kick the kidnaper should he try to run away from Stubby or me."

They looked and looked, but could find no one and at last gave up the chase and went on their way toward Billy's home. But in searching for the kidnaper they had lost their way and now did not know in which direction to go until they could find the big, red brick hotel in the center of the town where the crow had told the Widow Brown Billy was to turn to the left.

"That shouldn't be so hard to find in a town of this size," said Stubby.

"No, I don't think so, either," said Billy.

"I suggest," said Bettina, "that each go in an opposite direction and the one that finds it first is to stand on the corner, and if it should happen to be Stubby, he can bark; caterwaul if it is Button; baa if it is you, Billy, and if I find it first, I will bray loud enough to call out all the police and the fire department to stop me for I will awaken all the townspeople."

This idea was carried out and the friends separated, all going at a brisk trot. Nothing was heard for some time when out on the stillness Billy's baa! baa! could be heard.

"He has found it!" said each of the others to himself as they hurried to join him.

But their astonishment was great when they found him standing in front of a big grey stone building, with iron bars at all the windows instead of before a red brick hotel.

"Why, Billy, what is the matter? Are you color blind?" asked Bettina.

"No, but I found something good to show you, so thought I would call you."

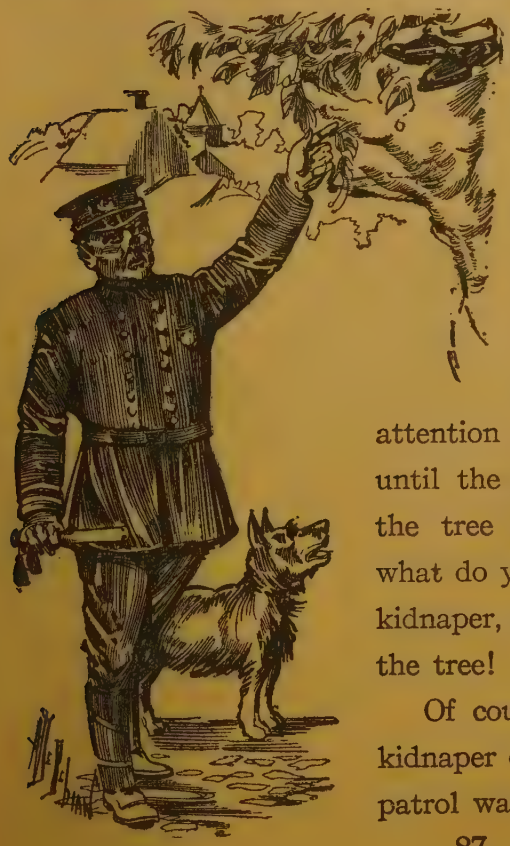
"I don't see anything very interesting to look at around here," said Button.

"You don't? Well, look at that third basement window and see if you don't!"

All eyes immediately searched out that window, and what do you think they saw? Nothing less than the face of the kidnaper pressed against the bars, with his arm raised, shaking his fist at them. And with what baaing, barking, mewing and braying they answered him, and how they skipped around as if laughing and dancing at his discomfort! They kept this up until the warden sent a policeman out to chase them away. When they saw him coming they skedaddled in all directions, and again began the hunt for the red brick hotel.

Again everything was still for some time when they heard Stubby

barking as if he was very much excited, and wanted them to come in a hurry. It did not sound at all like a signal bark. Each one, on hearing it, started on a dead run in the direction from which it came; so did every dog they met on the way, and the policeman on the beat, so that when they turned the corner, all coming from opposite directions, quite a crowd was brought to the scene.



When they came in sight of Stubby, there he was, not in front of the hotel, but running around and around a tree as if mad, nearly barking his head off. Stubby paid no attention to anyone, but kept this up until the policeman got directly under the tree and looked up into it. And what do you think he saw but the other kidnaper, whom Stubby had chased up the tree!

Of course, the policeman made the kidnaper come down and as soon as the patrol wagon got there, he was carried

off to the jail, where he was put in a cell with his chum—the officer not knowing they were pals.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW HOMES

S SOON as the patrol-wagon disappeared with its prisoner, the crowd dispersed, and our quartet of Billy, Stubby, Button and Bettina were left standing together, discussing what they would do next, when a crowd of boys between ten and twelve years of age rounded the corner. They were surprised very much to see an odd group of animals that had never been in town before, as they knew every dog, cow, pig, goat and mule and to whom they belonged.

"Will you look at that group on the opposite corner?" exclaimed one of the boys.

"It looks as if they were having a tea party," said another.

"Funny combination—a Billy goat, a dog, cat and burro," declared another, while a fourth said:

"Say, boys, I see some fun here! Let's catch that Billy and

burro and hitch them to separate carts and have a race. It will be lots of fun."

"Enough said!" exclaimed a fifth.

"But how are you going to catch and hold them?" asked the most practical lad of the lot, whom the other boys called Professor, as he was always so studious and cautious.

"Oh, go long, slow-poke!" impatiently exclaimed Chump, who was always getting into trouble and was too chuckle-headed to get himself out. "That is easy! Walk right up behind them and catch hold of the goat's horns and lead him off, and take hold of the burro's ears or mane and do the same with her."

"Your remarks show you are not very well acquainted with the dispositions and actions of goats and mules," said a boy they called C. S. because he always seemed to have more common sense than all the rest of his chums put together.

"The best way to capture them is to get a peck of oats and hold it before the burro's nose, and a bunch of carrots to entice the goat. Then they will follow without any trouble wherever you wish to take them," said another boy.

"Cleve has had another of his clever ideas," said the boy they called Professor.

You can guess why they called this boy Cleve from hearing the Professor address him as he did.

"What are you fellows going to do with the dog and the cat?" asked Chump. "For if you don't want them, I would like to have the dog."

"Go ahead," said C. S. "Take him along; no one wants him. He will probably follow when you lead off the burro by its ears or mane, as you just suggested."

"I'll take the cat," said Cleve. "That is, if I can make friends with him, but I doubt it from the knowing look in those big, yellow eyes of his."

"I wonder why those boys keep gazing at us! It looks as though they were talking about us," said Bettina.

"They are probably trying to concoct some plan to steal us," said Billy knowingly.

"That is just what they are up to," said Stubby.

"Watch them capture me!" said Bettina.

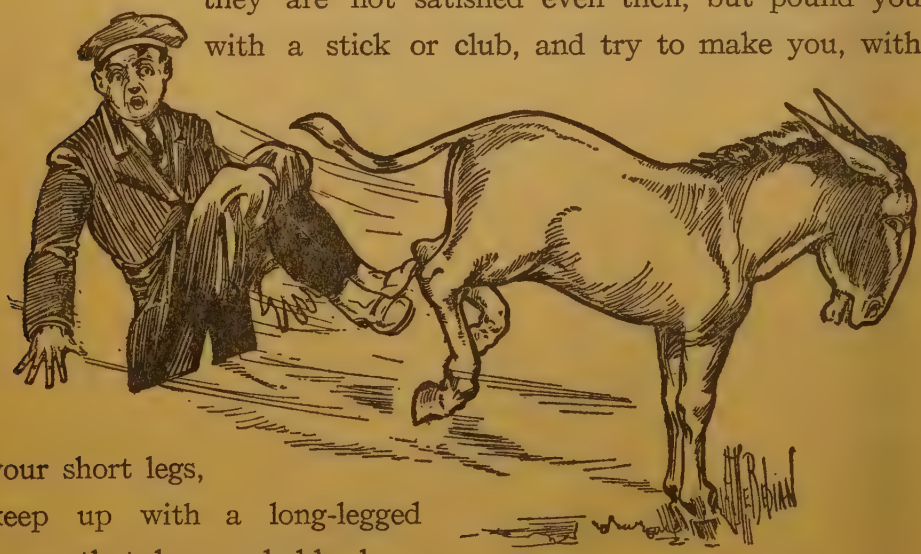
"What are you going to do?" asked Button.

"Look as docile as a lamb, and when they lay hands on me, wheel and kick them into the middle of the road."

"Oh, Bettina, you would not be so cruel, would you?" asked Button, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I certainly would, for I detest boys of that age. If they think they are going to catch me and make me haul them around in a little cart, they are mistaken. I drew one once for a boy that age,

and they have no sense. They think an animal has no brains or feelings and can go at a mad gallop all the time on a hot day and never get tired or winded. They like to drive fast because it makes them cooler—the speed making a breeze that fans their faces. And when you try to accommodate them and keep up a reasonably swift pace, they do not like it, and when you go as fast as you can, they are not satisfied even then, but pound you with a stick or club, and try to make you, with



your short legs, keep up with a long-legged horse that has probably been ridden up beside you with one of their friends on its back. No! No! Emphatically no! I shall kick and bite like a fiend if they try to capture me."

While Bettina was making this long speech, Chump had been

coming nearer and nearer, and as she finished, he stepped directly behind her and laid his hand on her, intending to give her a gentle pat before taking hold of her ears to lead her off.

This shows how well this boy deserved the name of Chump his companions had given him, for he certainly was a chump to go so near the heels of any animal, be it horse, mule or cow. As his hand touched Bettina, she let both heels fly, and Chump was kicked back a dozen feet, where he lay sprawling in the dust.

Stubby thought he must nearly be killed, he lay so still. He ran to him and began to lick his face to try to revive him.

For a second the boys laughed to see how quickly Bettina had done exactly as they had predicted, but when they saw that Chump did not get up, but lay lifeless, they were very much subdued and approached him in silence, fearful of finding him dead. The Professor knelt beside him, and put his ear to Chump's heart, to see if it was still beating, for he looked so pale and was so still that he was very much frightened and the boys all stood around with long-drawn faces, while the Professor was bending over him.

"Somebody get some water while I chafe his hands," commanded C. S. when the Professor reported that his heart was still beating.

"I will bring it in my hat," said one of the boys, "and then I'll run for a doctor."

"No, don't," moaned Chump, who now showed signs of reviving, "I don't want anyone to know what a fool I was."

With the aid of the water and a little more rubbing, he sat up and soon was all right as Bettina's kick had only knocked the breath out of him.

Bettina, on seeing what she had done, felt very sorry, and to show it she came and stood close beside the boys.

"See," said Cleve, "the little burro acts as if she was sorry for what she has done and I bet you could ride her now without so much as a bridle."

"Get up, Chump, and try," said C. S.

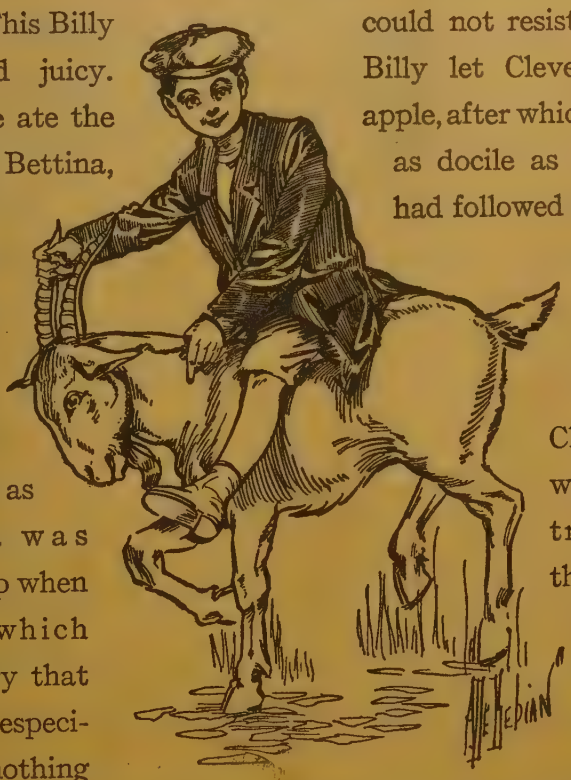
Chump got up and after patting Bettina's nose and scratching her behind the ears (the favorite place with most animals) Chump threw his leg over her back and rode off.

As I told you before, Bettina's legs were short so that Chump's feet nearly dragged on the ground, and every once in a while he would stretch them and walk on his toes, which made a very ridiculous sight.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

"I think I will try and ride that Billy goat," said Cleve, "for he is as large and strong as the burro, but I will approach him very cautiously at first."

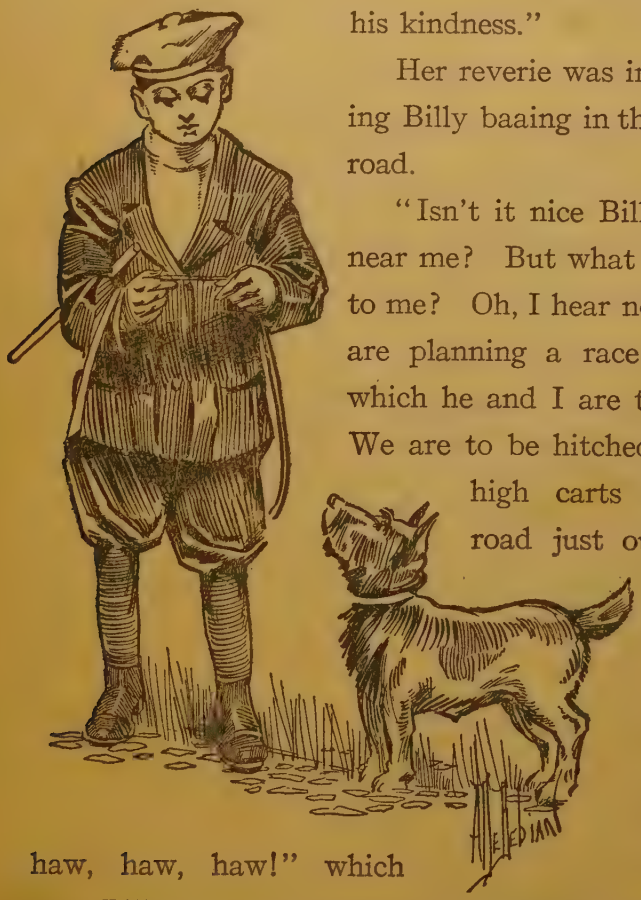
Cleve walked up to Billy with a nice, red, juicy apple held out in his hand. This Billy could not resist—it looked too ripe and juicy. Billy let Cleve get on his back, while he ate the apple, after which he trotted off, following Bettina, as docile as a lamb.



Stubby had followed Chump and Bettina, and now Buttonton tagged along after Billy, expecting to get a good dinner when he reached Cleve's house, which he did, as well as Billy. Bettina was treated royally by Chump when they reached his home, which made her feel very sorry that she had kicked him, especially as he had done nothing mean to her, and the kinder he was to her now, the more remorseful she felt.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

"I just wish," thought Bettina to herself, "that he would want me to do something for him. Then I would show him I appreciate his kindness."



Her reverie was interrupted here by hearing Billy baaing in the stable yard across the road.

"Isn't it nice Billy has found a home so near me? But what is that he is baaing out to me? Oh, I hear now! It is that the boys are planning a race for this afternoon in which he and I are to be against each other. We are to be hitched to light, two-wheeled, high carts and driven down the road just outside the town. The race is to be a two mile one, from the outskirts of the town to the fairgrounds."

"Heehaw! Heehaw! Heehaw! Heehaw, haw, haw!" which meant, "I am with you, Billy, and I intend to try my best to beat you."

"Oh, hush up!" said Chump. "You are splitting my ears

with your seesaw, heehaw. Do you know what she is making all that racket about, little dog?" asked Chump of Stubby, as he was rubbing against Chump's trouser legs.

"Bow-wow!" barked Stub.

"Well, I never! I believe he does, and is answering me. Too bad I can't understand dog language."

At this point Cleve came whistling into the yard.

"Say, Chump, can you loan me a strap long enough to make a trace out of it? If you can, you are welcome to anything I have to piece out your harness. If you take my advice, you'll stop that burro eating hay, or she'll be so stuffed this afternoon that she can't run. Of course, I know I should not give my enemies points on how to take care of their steeds before the race, but I am so sure of beating you with her, at the best, that I don't want her to die from fatigue and over-eating when half through the race."

"Oh, never you fear! It will take all the wind and speed your Billy goat has to keep her ears in sight."

"Well, so long! Thanks for the strap. I'll loan you my blinders if you want them so she won't see Billy pass her and get discouraged at the outset."

"I think I won't need them, but if you'd like my whip to help start Billy, you are welcome to it, as I shan't need it. My little burro runs without a whip."

"When is the race to begin?" asked the Professor and C. S. as they sauntered into the yard, eating green apples.

"In about half an hour."

"I am going to bet on the burro," said the Professor.

"And I on the goat," said C. S.

"What are you going to bet?" asked Chump.

"I've bet C. S. a peck of peanuts, and they are dandy ones at that, for I raised them myself and each shell is filled out with a big, fat nut, and he has bet me a peck of pears off his finest pear tree that the goat beats."

"It always seems queer to me to think of peanuts growing in the ground like potatoes," said Chump. "They ought to grow on trees like other nuts, I should think."

"Well, I don't think the Creator will change their mode of growing just to please you," said C. S.

"Heehaw! Heehaw, heehaw, heehaw, haw, haw!" brayed Bettina.

"Oh, keep still," said Chump, as he threw an apple at Bettina's head to stop her.

"Go wet your whistle," said C. S.

"Lower your voice to lower C, or you will strain it," said the Professor.

"Say, boys," spoke up Cleve, "I have an idea. What say you

that we get a tiny little cart and hitch the big, black cat in it and make her run a race against the dog?"

"Bully idea!" agreed C. S.

"If you catch the cat," said the Professor.

"I know where there is a little red cart that would be just right for the cat," said C. S. "and I'll go get it while you boys catch her," so he started on a dead run for the house, to sneak his sister's doll cart for the race.

"Hello, where are you going so fast?" asked Cleve, as he entered the gate and was nearly knocked over by C. S. as he ran out.

"To get a cart!"

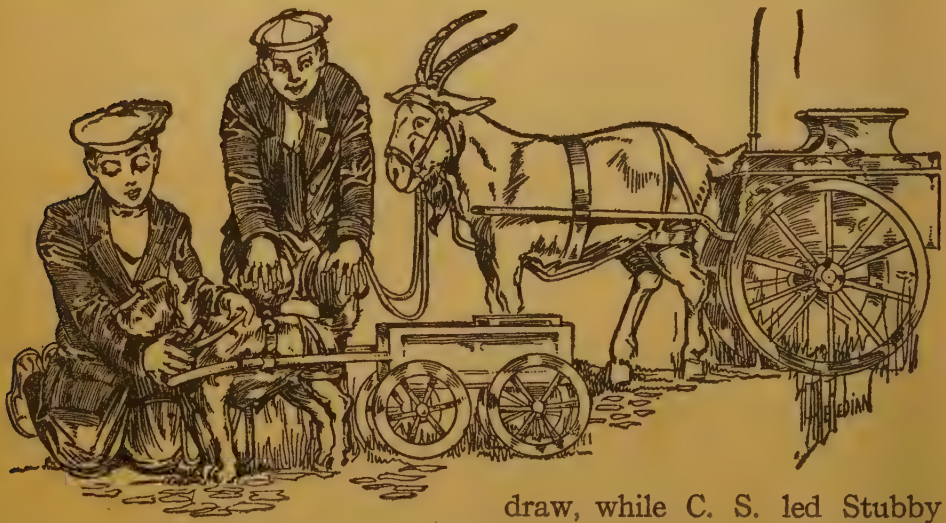
He was back in a jiffy, and with much laughing, talking, tugging and pulling Button was hitched to a tiny little red doll cart, and Stubby to one about twice its size, while Bettina and Billy were hitched to high, two-wheeled carts for the race.

When all was in readiness, the boys, each leading an animal, walked out of the yard and, selecting the most quiet streets so as not to attract any more attention than could be helped, proceeded to the outskirts of the town where the race was to begin.

When they came in sight, a shout went up from the boys and girls who were sitting on the bank beside the road, and on the top rail of the fence that bordered the road, waiting for the arrival of the contestants. When they saw a big, black cat hitched to a little,

red wagon, they howled with delight, for none of them had ever seen a cat draw a wagon before.

When the boys had the animals ready to start, Chump stepped into the cart behind Bettina, and Cleve into the one Billy was to



draw, while C. S. led Stubby up into line with Billy and Bettina, and the Professor did the same with Button. C. S. and the Professor were to run along beside Stubby and Button to keep them in the road.

When they were all in line, a boy at the side of the road dropped a flag as they do in horse races when it is time to start, and with a hurrah from the crowd of onlookers, the queer group started down the road.

CHAPTER IX

THE RACE

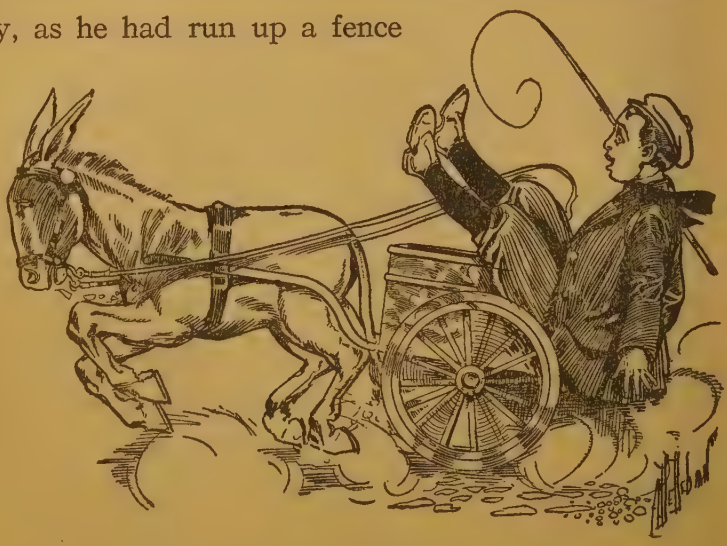
ETTINA and Billy ran about even for a long way, then all of a sudden Stubby passed them, with Button close behind.

It was such a queer sight to see a cat hitched to a little, red wagon that turned upside down every few minutes and scraped along on its back until it hit some stone or clod in the road that turned it right side up again, and made Button curve his back and stick up his tail even straighter than ever with the noise it made, that Bettina forgot that she was in the race and stopped to heehaw at the sight.

"Here, you stop that laughing and get along!" said Chump. "You can do your heehawing after we do the winning part," and he gave Bettina a crack of the whip, which both surprised and maddened her, so that she gave a quick start forward, for which Chump was so unprepared that it spilled him out and he fell backward out of the cart, and Bettina dashed on without him.

With the cart so much lightened, she gained time so that she

soon out-distanced Billy and even Stubby, who had run under a bridge to get a drink of water, while Button was declared out of the race entirely, as he had run up a fence post, taking the little wagon with him, where he sat watching the race as if he had no interest in it except as spectator.



Billy came in only a few paces behind Bettina, baaing his displeasure at the whole performance. In fact, he was so disgusted that he began to kick and kick, never stopping until the little wagon lay in fragments around his feet. Then he kicked up his heels once more, but higher than ever, and started down the road at such a pace that the boys could not overtake him, and what was more, he kept this pace until he was miles away from the boys and even out of sight of the chimney tops of the village.

Billy now lay down to rest and to wait for Bettina, Stubby and

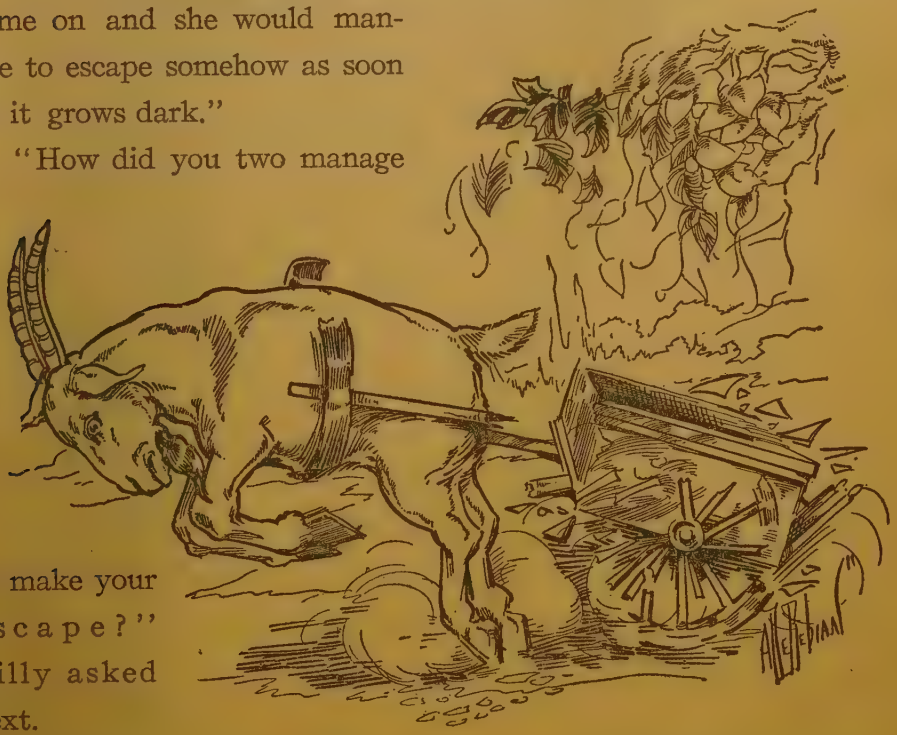
Button to join him, for he knew they would do so as soon as they could get away from the boys.

While waiting he fell asleep and was snoring when Stubby and Button came upon him about two hours later.

"Where is Bettina?" he asked when he saw them.

"She could not get away," said Stubby, "so she said for us to come on and she would manage to escape somehow as soon as it grows dark."

"How did you two manage to make your escape?" Billy asked next.



"I ran up a tree the boys could not climb and got the harness

so tangled in the limbs of the tree that it broke and let the wagon drop to the ground, and I was free," said Button. "But I still have this uncomfortable leather collar around my neck. Won't you chew it off for me, Stubby?"

"I don't know, but I can try," and Stubby chewed and chewed on the leather, but it did not give in the least. Then Billy took a turn, but it only showed signs of little tooth marks, and did not drop off.

"Oh, never mind; let it stay! Some person will take pity on me and take it off some day."

"I hear someone coming," said Billy. "We'd better jump the fence and hide in the woods until they have passed."

After a farm wagon had gone by, Billy said:

"This seems to be a pretty safe place to stay, and I suggest that we remain here until Bettina joins us. Then I must hurry on toward home. I wonder how far we are off the road the crow told me to follow."

"I am sure I don't know," replied Stubby, "but from the looks of that smoke over there, I should judge we are not far from a railroad and in all probability that train is on the very road we were to cross after we left the town."

"You are right, I believe," said Button. "And I say we all go to sleep and then when Bettina comes we will be ready to travel on."

This suggestion they followed and presently they were all fast asleep. While they were sleeping, we will go back and see what became of Bettina.

She was driven back, shut in Chump's back yard, given a drink from a trough, and a peck of oats, while Chump went in to get his own supper.

The bright day was turning to a stormy one at its close, and just as Bettina finished her supper, she felt big drops of rain pelting her on the nose.

"Guess we are in for a stormy night," she mused.

In fact, the storm increased so fast and furiously that by midnight it was a perfect gale and several times churches, trees and telephone poles were struck by the lightning, as was also the jail in which the two kidnapers were imprisoned.

The kidnapers were huddled in their cell, expecting every minute to be struck, when a blinding flash lighted up the cell until it was as bright as day, and they felt a queer, numb sensation run through them, when lo and behold! the wall of the prison seemed to divide and fall asunder. That was all they realized, for they knew not how long it was until one of them, coming to slightly, felt drops of rain on his face and, opening his eyes, he found he was staring at the sky instead of at the prison ceiling, while the rain was coming down in torrents on his upturned face.

Slowly and by degrees, he began to come out of his stupor and realize what had happened to him.

The prison had been struck with lightning, which had shattered the old stone walls until they had fallen to pieces. And now he was free if he could only get on his feet and run away before the prison warden could catch him. Then he thought of his pal, and wondered what had become of him. Another blinding flash of lightning revealed his pal lying on his face not three feet away. He put out his hand to touch him, being very fearful to do it, however, lest he find him dead. But when he at last had the courage to do so, his pal moved and said:

"Stop shaking me! It's not time to get up! I'm sleepy!"

He touched him again, giving him an impatient little shake and saying:

"Come, Tom, wake up!"

"Can't you let a fellow alone? It is hard enough to have to sleep in this bumpy bed, which is hard as a rock, without havin' you pinch me all the time to waken me. Stop pourin' water on me, will you?" and he turned over on his side, ready to hit his pal for sprinkling him with water, but when he went to do so, his hand touched the cold, wet stone of the broken prison wall, and he felt the rain come dashing in his face. It woke him in a hurry, and he sat up and exclaimed:

"We are free! If you've got your senses back enough to sneak away with me, come on!"

"Jiminy cracks! You bet I've sense enough left to do that!"

But when they tried to start, they found they were so stiff they could scarcely stand, let alone run, so they sneaked away in the shadows liked whipped dogs to look for a place to hide.

As luck would have it, it continued to pour without any flashes of lightning, and everything was as dark as pitch, which favored their flight.

The prison authorities thought, of course, that the two men had been killed, either by the flash of lightning that struck that part of the prison or else by the falling walls. Consequently they did not go out to look for them.

"Jim, under cover of this darkness we should get as far away as possible from here before morning. Where shall we go?"

"The best thing for us to do is to try and find the railroad, hide in a box car and be carried off to any old place while they are lookin' for our bodies in the ruins. Of course, they'll think we are both killed. If they don't find us by removing a few stones, they will take it for granted we're buried deep under the big ones, and let us stay as it would be too much bother to remove them."

"Darn that big goat!" said Tom. "I wish I'd never seen him! He is foxier than any person I ever met."

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

Choo, choo, choo, choo! disturbed the stillness.

"Hear that? Gee, we can't be far from a railroad, for that is certainly the puff of an engine climbing up grade."

"If so, we'd better run in that direction as that will help us find the railroad in the quickest way. Time's precious to us."

Instead of following the road, they climbed fences, went through gardens, potato fields and everything, hit or miss, in their endeavor to reach the railroad by a straight short cut.

They had much better given the matter a little thought and found the road, for in all probability any road running in that direction would have crossed the tracks sooner or later. Besides, they could have made much better time in the darkness by following the road than by trying to go cross-lots with a sky as black as ink. The consequences were that they were mud-bespattered when they did

come out on the tracks, for the rain had made the newly ploughed fields as soft as gingerbread, into which they had sunk nearly to their knees. They struck one garden with tomato vines in it, and the long stems got tangled around their feet, and threw them, squashing the red juice of the fruit all over them. But worse yet, their hands and clothes were torn by the thorns of the black raspberry bushes.

When at last they did reach the tracks, their tempers were in a worse shape than their clothes, and each called the other a fool for coming that way.

"Jim, you always were a fool for rushin' off without givin' a thought of where you were a goin'. If you had stopped a minute, we might have come by the road, for the shortest cut is not always the best way to reach a place."

"That's right, ninny! Stand up and preach! It will do you so much good now it's all over. If you don't like this way, why did you come? Or before you started, why didn't you suggest the road idea? I like people who follow like sheep, never havin' an idea of their own, but who wait until all is over and then begin to complain and ask why you didn't do this or that."

"Oh, bosh!" said his pal. "I'm tired of listening to your gab!"

Choo, choo, choo!

"Here comes another train and it is going so slowly that I think we can swing on. If we can, that will be better than goin' to the

station to try to get in a car, for there won't be anyone a watchin' to keep people from getting on."

Just as the kidnapers attempted to board the train, a cattle man on top of one of the cars poked a long pole he used to prod his cattle in their faces and kept them off. He laughed at their discomfort and they in turn shook their fists and swore vengeance on him. But that was all the good it did, for the train passed by and they were left standing by the railroad tracks in a most disconsolate mood.

"What shall we do now?" asked Tom.

But before Jim could answer, it was decided for them, for a farmer had set his two bulldogs on them and they were forced to take to their heels and they only avoided the dogs by climbing up on a high pile of railroad ties beside the track and fighting them off with a long stick of wood until their master called them off.

The farmer had not seen the tramps, but had heard the dogs

barking at something and sicked them on. So when they kept on barking, he decided the dogs had chased a cat up a tree, and called them off.

And here we will leave the tramps for the present, to see what Billy and his friends have been doing in the meantime.

CHAPTER X

TWO MONKEYS AND A HAND ORGAN

HE DAY after the storm Billy, Bettina, Stubby and Button all returned to the town to try to find the red brick hotel they had been looking for when they were coaxed off by the boys.

"We must find that hotel today or bust," said Billy, "and woe betide anyone that tries to stop me. If we don't find it, we can't follow the crow's directions, in which case I won't be able to find my way back to Nannie."

After reaching the town, they separated as before, with the understanding that the one to find it first was to stay there and keep calling until the others came to him.

As Billy was walking peacefully up one street and down another, wondering where that red brick hotel could be, he heard a great clatter and commotion behind him and, turning, he saw a heavy steam roller rumbling along the street. But this was not the only noise he heard or the only thing he saw, for running ahead of it was a small, bony horse, snorting and puffing as he tried to kick himself

loose from a hurdy-gurdy, on the front seat of which sat an oily Italian and his wife, while up behind them on the top of the hurdy-gurdy sat two monkeys, dressed in blue and scarlet, little caps on their heads trimmed with gold lace and bells. The Italian was trying to stop the frightened horse and his wife was trying to protect her knees from the kicking horse, while the monkeys clung to the top of the hurdy-gurdy, their wrinkled faces drawn into deep scowls. Down the street they came, headed directly for Billy, with the old hurdy-gurdy throwing out stray notes now and then as it received an extra jolt which moved the machinery.

"I'll just stop this runaway," thought Billy to himself, "by placing myself in the middle of the street so they can't pass."

Just as Billy came to this conclusion, the hurdy-gurdy went over a bad place in the street, which threw the Italian and his wife out on their heads, knocking them senseless. The monkeys still clung on and one, seeing his master gone and the horse still running, jumped on the horse's back and in some way managed to stop it.

By this time they were very near to where Billy was standing, and he called out to the monkey:

"Good work! You are a clever fellow!"

But the monkey only looked at him with twinkling eyes and did not reply.

When the hurdy-gurdy came to a standstill, the monkey on the

'First," said Billy, "we will walk around in a circle, slowly lifting first one foot and then the other."

horse's back jumped to his seat beside his chum and sat there as if nothing had happened.

Down the street the rattle of the patrol wagon could be heard as it came in answer to a telephone call that someone had sent. The Italians were soon picked up by the police and put in the patrol wagon for they were still insensible. As the patrol moved off with the Italians, two policemen came to see what they could do with the hurdy-gurdy and the two monkeys who still sat straight and stiff on its top like sentinels. The police, on coming up, decided to get into the hurdy-gurdy and drive it to the police station and keep it there until they found out where the Italians lived. One of them began to gather up the reins which were on the ground, while the other sprang up on the seat directly in front of one of the monkeys. Piff! went his helmet, rolling in the street. Slap came a blow on his cheek by a slim hand with long nails, which gave him a scratch on the face.

The surprised policeman thought his helmet had been knocked off by some boy throwing a stone, but when he felt the slap and scratch of the tiny hand, he knew it was the monkey. He called for assistance, and the other policeman jumped up on the hurdy-gurdy with club raised to beat off the monkeys, but they were too quick for him. The one he tried to hit gave a spring and landed on the top of his head, then slipped down his back, tearing open his coat

from top to bottom with his sharp claws and for about ten minutes all one could see was a flash of red, then blue, then yellow, then a club as it was flung high in the air, ready to come down on one of the monkey's backs, but they were never there when it did come down. The monkeys jumped here and there, clawing, biting, scratching and chattering, but they would not leave the hurdy-gurdy; neither would they allow the policeman to sit in their master's place and drive. So the police had to give it up, much to the amusement of the gaping crowd which had gathered to watch the tussle and to see who would come out ahead. And when they at last hitched the hurdy-gurdy horse to the back of another wagon and drove off with the monkeys still guarding their master's seat, the crowd howled with delight, and even the scratched policeman had to laugh when he turned and saw the monkeys sitting up straight with their fore legs folded like arms across their chests, looking for all the world like coachman and footman on the box of some brougham.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha!" laughed Billy to himself, "that scene is as good as a play at the circus. I hope the organ grinder and his wife are not killed, for I would like them to live to find out how their monkeys protected their property, but if I thought they were any relation to the Italians who kidnaped me, I would go this minute and butt their old hurdy-gurdy in at the back."

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

Happening to look up, Billy saw a red, white and blue barber pole before him. But what was the matter? The stripes in the pole seemed to be running around and around in a dizzy whirl.

"Well," thought he to himself, "I must be going daffy or crazy, or my eyes are deceiving me, for whoever heard of or saw a pole stand still while the stripes chased each other up and down on it? They go so fast it makes me dizzy to look at them. I'll just settle their mad race, however, and be a benefactor to mankind as well by butting that pole over, for to watch those stripes is enough to make a child cross-eyed."

Biff! went a head against a glass barber pole, followed by a shower of glass, and the stripes were still, while the pole lay ruined on the sidewalk. Of course the sound of the falling, shattered glass brought the barber to the door to see what was the matter. Imagine his anger when he saw a big Billy goat standing there looking at the fallen pole.

"You big, meddling brute, you!" called out the enraged barber

and he hurried into the shop for a broom to beat Billy. He soon appeared with one held high over his head, ready to strike Billy, who stood facing him as he appeared in the doorway.

To see Billy so defiant rather disconcerted the barber for a minute, but not knowing what a fighter Billy was, he made a strike for him, only hitting him on the top of the horns and not hurting him in the least.

Still, Billy resented being struck at so, and he made one spring at the barber, hitting him in the stomach, which knocked him flat on his back. Then Billy quietly stepped over him into the shop. Seeing this, the other barbers who were busy shaving customers thought it would be their turn next, so left their customers and fled through the back door of the shop, carrying their cups of lather with them.

The men in the chairs, who were being shaved or shampooed or having their faces massaged, looked up to see what had caused the sudden departure of the barbers, only to find themselves staring

into the face of a big Billy goat, while the head barber was trying to pick himself up off the floor, after having Billy walk on him. The sight of the inquiring faces as they one by one popped their heads up from the comfortable cushions on which they had been resting tickled Billy immensely. There was a man with his head all lather; in the next chair was a man with his face shining with greasy cold cream, ready to be massaged in to make him look as pink and white as a girl; next a man with one cheek shaved and the other with the whiskers still on.

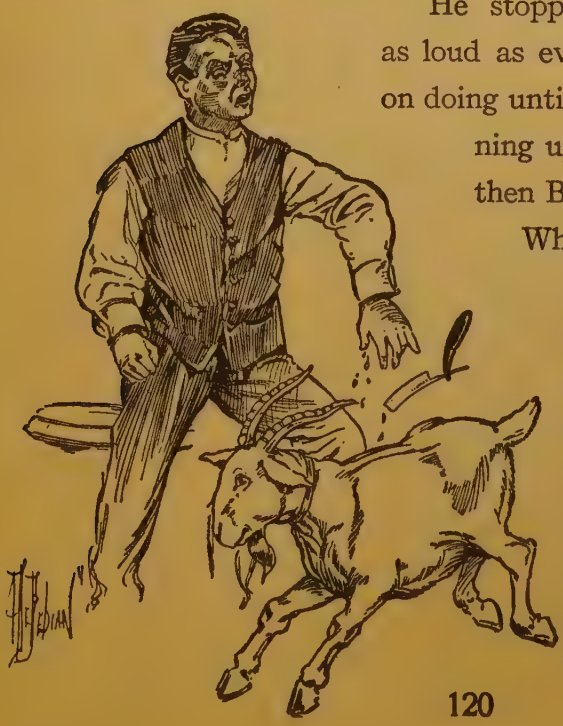
"Look out! Look out! He's dangerous!" called the fallen barber.

At this each man proceeded to protect himself as best he could. One snatched up a long-necked bottle of shampoo stuff and, heedless that the preparation was running all over him, held it high above his head, ready to strike Billy did he come too near. Another man jumped up in his chair and pulled the sheet over his head to try to hide from Billy. On seeing this, Billy gave him a butt in the ribs through the sheet that made him groan, for if there was anything Billy hated it was a coward.

The man in the end chair held an open razor in his hand, ready to cut Billy's throat should he come at him. But Billy had no intention of running the risk of having his throat cut, so he only hunched his back and made a spring as if to butt the man with the

razor, but took good care to land beyond arm's reach. The man, thinking he was going to be butted and hooked, jumped behind the chair as he did so. The razor hit the back of the chair, and the blade came down on his thumb, cutting it badly. On seeing this, Billy gave a big baa, kicked his heels in the air and ran out of the shop and down the street.

He had not gone far when he saw directly in front of him the red brick hotel he had been looking for so long.



He stopped right then and baahed as loud as ever he could, which he kept on doing until he saw Bettina come running up. Soon came Stubby and then Button.

When they were all together, they started down the left-hand road, as the crow said they should, and were soon out in the country on the road which would eventually lead them to Nannie—that is, of course, if nothing turned up to prevent.

CHAPTER XI

PERFORMING ANIMALS

"THIS seems like it used to, Bettina, in the old circus days, doesn't it?" asked Billy, as he walked beside the little, long-eared burro on the dusty road, with Stubby and Button both sitting on Bettina's back having a ride, all of them looking for a farmhouse where they could turn in to get something to eat and to drink.

"I hear a farm wagon rattling up the hill," said Bettina. "I'll tell you what let's do. Pretend we are trained animals from the circus and when the farmer gets to the top of the hill where he can see us, we must all begin to do tricks. Then he will think we have escaped from the circus and try to capture us for the reward he will think will be offered. And when he catches us, he will take us home with him and treat us fine, hoping for the large reward."

"Bettina, you're a genius," exclaimed Billy.

"I should think she is!" agreed Stubby.

Button purred his delight at the timely suggestion.

"Now get ready," said Bettina, "for by the sound, I think the farmer must be nearing the top of the hill."

"All right," said Stubby. "When he appears, he will find me standing on my head on your back, as I used to in the circus."

"And me sitting on your head between your ears," said Button, "waving my fore paws at him."

"What are you going to do, Billy?" asked Bettina.

"Oh, I think I'll stand up on my hind legs, making myself look as tall as possible, and dance around you. Then when Stubby stops standing on his head, I will jump over your back. After that, I will do anything that comes into my mind."

"So we all will," said Button.

"Now ready," said Bettina, "for I see the horses' ears appearing just above the top of the hill."

The farmer, all unconscious of the scene prepared for him, came jogging sleepily along to the crest of the hill where he expected to see before him the familiar scene of the long, dusty road running down into the valley, with the tall poplar trees that surrounded his home appearing on the opposite hill. But great was his surprise to see in the middle of the road, not three hundred feet from him, a queer looking object that seemed to be neither mule, goat, dog nor cat, but all four, as it kept changing shape every minute. He was

so astonished to see such a queer looking object on the familiar road that he could not believe his eyes. He rubbed them with the back of his hand, but no amount of rubbing dispelled the vision. It was still taking on new shapes each minute.

The farmer drew in his horse to see what would happen next. As he did this, his horses smelled the goat and seeing something queer standing in the middle of the road, pricked up their ears and looked with interest at what was going on before them. And what they saw would have put to shame many a performance seen in a circus.

First, Button sat between Bettina's ears and waved his fore paws as if beckoning the farmer to come on. Then he turned around, stood on his head and kicked his hind legs at the farmer. After this he gave a spring and landed on Billy's back, where he kept on going through his antics. While Button was doing this, Stubby turned a somersault off Bettina's back, landing on the ground on all fours. Then he gave a sharp bark, ran under Bettina and jumped on her back again, going through this performance several times in quick succession. Then he turned his attention to Billy and Stubby and the three began to jump and twirl back and forth as if the ring master at the circus was putting them through these tricks for the benefit of a great audience.

But don't think that Bettina was still while all this was going

on, for she too was kicking, rearing and heehawing as if she was in the center of a three-ring circus.

From astonishment the farmer's mind turned to mirth and he sat there open-mouthed, enjoying it as much as though he had paid fifteen cents admission to see it done in a circus.

"Blessed if I ever see such smart animals before! They must have run away from some showman. I cal'late that if I could get 'em in my barnyard where I could keep 'em until their master advertises for 'em I might get quite a bit of money for their return. I'll just try and coax 'em along by showing 'em these nice ears of corn."

He leaned over to look under the seat and to get the corn and when he raised his head again, there stood the four animals in a straight line, bowing their heads like actors and actresses do after a performance.

"Well, by gosh! them animals do be perty near human. Now I'll see if I can get 'em to foller the wagon as I drive along. Go 'lang!" and he slapped his team with the reins.

When he was even with them, Bettina stepped out of the line and took the corn in her teeth and began to eat it. The farmer drove on, expecting them to follow, but only Bettina came, while the others stayed in a straight line.

"Hump," grunted the farmer, "'pears like I got to offer all

of 'em somethin' to get 'em to foller. I wonder what I've got about me that a dog and cat would like to eat."

The farmer took off his old straw hat, scratched his head and frowned so hard one would have thought he was trying to squeeze a thought out of his head by this process—which he undoubtedly was—but at any rate, the idea came. There was a part of his luncheon left and, being a thrifty farmer, he had kept it instead of throwing it away. Once again he reached under the seat and this time brought out a lunch basket, out of which he took a sandwich and a piece of meat. These he offered to Stubby and Button. Of course they took them immediately and both jumped upon the seat beside the farmer to show their friendliness toward him. Button rubbed up against him to purr his thanks for the food and Stubby barked and wagged his tail nearly off.

But how was he to get Billy? For there he stood in the middle of the road, the last one to win over. The farmer looked and looked for something for him

to eat. In desperation he offered him oats, straw, tobacco, but Billy stood still, refusing to take any of these things. At last the farmer gave up and started for home, calling to Billy to wait where he was and he would return with something which the goat liked to eat.

"Now, goatie," said the farmer, "you stand right where you are, or round about here until I come back and I'll bring you a nice bunch of carrots. Now, mind, don't you go off with anyone else, fer I've taken a powerful likin' to ye. Besides, it wouldn't be nice fer ye to go off and desert your friends what is going along with me. But I wouldn't mind if ye went and laid down behind them bushes 'side of the road, where it is nice and cool, until I come back."

By this suggestion the farmer showed that he was thinking more of himself than Billy. He wanted Billy to get behind the bushes so that anyone passing along the road would not see him and rob him of his reward for capturing the runaway animals.

"Say, look here, now," said the farmer, stopping his horses and addressing Billy as if he was a person, "you look like a perty smart feller, that could understand common sense. So I'm goin' to put one to ye. If ye will come along with me and yer friends, I'll treat ye to a couple bunches of carrots instead of one, the way I would if ye'd make me come way back here. I don't mind, only the horses is tired and besides, it'll keep ye waitin' longer than if ye come along with us right now"

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

But just to tease the farmer, Billy stood perfectly still. He never moved a peg as long as the farmer could see him by turning his head, but when the wagon was out of sight in the little hollow, Billy went to the side of the road and was just going to lie down to wait for the farmer's return when, horror of horrors! what did he see but his two kidnapers hiding behind the bushes, where evidently they had been watching him all the time.

Billy never stopped a second to butt or hook them, but took to his heels and flew down the road after the farmer, whom he soon overtook. Billy related his experience to Betsy as he walked along beside her.

"That's a good goatie," said the farmer, "I thought you would think it all over and decide to follow us."

Stubby jumped off the seat by the farmer and came to the back of the wagon to speak to Billy.

"Say, Billy, what made you change your mind and follow us?"

When Billy told him, he was so much astonished that he nearly

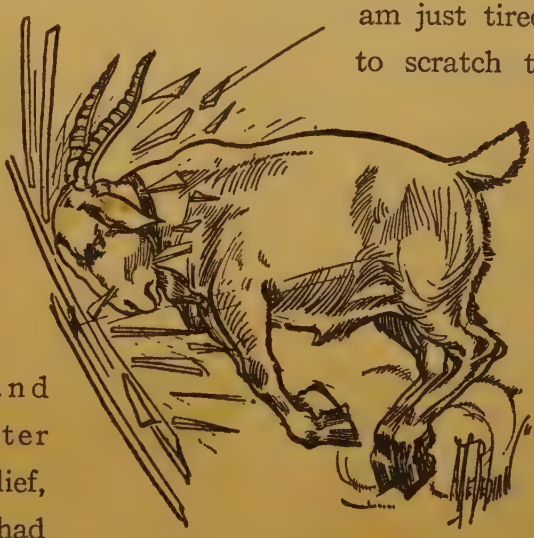
lost his balance and fell out of the wagon. He gave a quick, low bark that brought Button in a hurry to his side.

"What is the matter, Stub?"

"Nothing, only the kidnapers are on our track again."

"Gee whiz! What makes you think so? Did you see them?"

"No, but Billy did."



"Well, I am just tired enough of being tagged to scratch their eyes out the first time I see them, and I will do it if they don't look out," he replied.

While this conversation had been going on, the farmer had driven into his barnyard and carefully shut the gate, after which he gave a sigh of relief, for now he thought he had the circus animals safe. He did not know that had Billy, Bettina, or even Stubby or Button desired to run away his old, rickety gate would not have kept them in.

"Come right this way, Mr. Goat and Miss Burro, and I'll give you the biggest meal you ever had in your lives," and he led the way to

the stable where he gave Billy more carrots and turnips than he could eat, and Bettina corn and oats enough to make her sick, had she eaten it all. Then he went out, calling Stubby and Button to follow him to the house, where he would give them some meat, potatoes and gravy, well knowing that dogs and cats love gravy. But he did not forget to go back and bar the stable door so there would be no danger of Bettina and Billy escaping.

* * * * * * * *

"Well, Tom, if this ain't luck!" said one tramp to the other; "to find that goat just when we had given up all hope of ever settin' eyes on him again! And did ye see the way them animals went on like they was in a circus? Bless me! But I believe they have been in one and run away!"

"Guess they was, Jim. If that is so, it's all the better fer us. We'll cabbage all four of 'em and make 'em go through them antics fer us they was goin' through to please themselves. Tell you what, we can make lots and lots of money with them goin' around the country."

"Happy thought! They'll be more of a novelty than a brass band or a hand organ and a monkey."

"But how are we to get 'em away from the farmer?"

"Oh, that'll be easy! We'll steal 'em some night."

"Well, how in the dickens are you goin' to steal four live animals

and hide them? Each one of them would take a regiment to catch and keep," said the younger of the kidnapers.

"That's what your massive brain has to help me think out," replied the elder.

"If you're askin' for my advice it is this: Give up tryin' to get any of them except the goat. You'll find he will be more than both you and me can manage, at that!"

"Oh, don't be a quitter! Think of the money we will squeeze out of the tight-fisted farmers and the pieces of pie and the doughnuts their wives will hand out to us when we appear in their barnyards and make the animals go through their monkeyshines."

"Oh, I am not a quitter, but I tell you now, you will live to see the day you'll wish you had let 'em alone and taken my advice."

"Stop throwin' cold water on a feller's plans! I always did hate a feller that was afraid to take chances."

"All right! Your blood be upon your head, but when that Billy goat has butted you into the middle of next week, and the burro nearly kicked your head off, and the dog nearly chewed your shin bone, while the cat tries to scratch out your eyes, don't come to me for sympathy, fer if you do you won't get it, so there!"

"I guess you won't have to wait long after you get mixed up with 'em. If you intend to steal 'em tonight, we'd better be gettin' a move on ourselves, for I'm pretty hungry and we won't have much

In walked the procession, with Button in the lead and Billy and Bettina side by side.

time to stop fer meals when we once git hold of your menagerie, that's my opinion," said Tom.

"What do you say," asked Jim, "to our goin' right up to that farmhouse where the animals are now and tryin' to hire out as harvesters? If they don't want us, we'll ask to be allowed to help him with his chores for supper and a night's lodging in his barn. We'll be real soft-soapy and honey-boy to his wife and him, and I'll help him milk his cows, feed the chickens and do up his chores, while you help his wife draw the water, peel the potatoes, and get supper ready. They'll let us do it, and then when we are locked in the barn, it will be easy to get out and get the animals away under cover of the darkness. What say you?"

"Yes, it all sounds all right but the *easy* part."

"There you go again, croakin' like a sick bull-frog. If you give another croak, I'll punch your head!"

After this remark, neither said anything for some time, but they both crawled out from behind the bushes and began to walk toward the farmhouse.

"I'll tell you what, Jim, if we are goin' to steal them animals, I guess we'd better not show our phizes around there beforehand, or when the animals disappear they will suspect us right away and set the police on us."

"Guess you're right, Tom. Tell you what let's do then. Creep

up near the house, hide and wait until the farmer's family have all gone to bed and then break into the cellar and eat our fill of the cold victuals that are sure to be on the cellar shelves."

CHAPTER XII

BILLY DODGES THE KIDNAPERS

STEALTHILY the kidnapers crept up near the house and hid under a lilac bush, from which place they could see all that went on in the house. They saw the farmer, his wife, son and daughter sit down to a well-filled table of steaming hot things, which made their mouths water to behold, for it had been many days since they had had a hot meal.

"Hope they will leave some of the pork pie and mealy potatoes for us," said Tom, after watching the farmer's son pass his plate for a second helping.

"So do I," replied Sam. "I do hope the farmer chokes if he drinks another cup of that steaming coffee. The very smell of it is setting me crazy!"

"Well, at last the old fat lady is through, and I am glad she is, for she has eaten two slices of pie, and there is only one slice for you and me to divide between us."

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

"Goodness gracious! If the daughter isn't goin' to eat that!" said Jim.

"At last they are through," said Tom with a sigh of relief. "See her scrape all the leavin's into one place for the dog and cat."

"Gee, what a waste of victuals!" declared Jim. "To feed all that good mashed potatoes and gravy to an old mangy dog and a yawling cat!"

"Here, Shep! Here, Shep! Here, Shep!" called the farmer's wife, as she stood in the doorway with a heaping plate of food for the shepherd dog. She called and called, but no Shep appeared, and at last she set the plate down, saying as she did so: "Well, he can go without his supper if he doesn't care to come and get it! I haven't time to stand here holding his plate, waiting for him to come!"

She put the plate on the ground at the foot of the steps and went into the kitchen.

The door was barely shut when the kidnapers tumbled over each

other in their eagerness to reach the food. They were so hungry that even though the meat, vegetables and potatoes were all mixed together they did not mind, but pitched in and ate with their fingers all there was on the plate, even to taking a piece of bread and rubbing it around the plate until it looked as if it had been licked.

They had scarcely put the plate back where it belonged when the farmer's wife opened the door, and, on seeing the clean plate, thought of course the dog had licked it clean.

"Shep, you old rascal, why didn't you come when I called you? Come here, this minute!" and she peered out into the darkness, but saw no Shep. "Well, I declare, that dog does act too queer for any use tonight. One would almost think he had been killing sheep and was afraid to show his face."

All this time poor Shep was trying frantically to get out of the stable where he had been accidentally shut in. He could hear his mistress calling and though he barked in answer, she did not hear him. To add to his discomfort, a little later the old house cat came wandering toward the barn, licking her chops in satisfaction after making a supper of chicken legs and bread and gravy.

Though the stable doors were all locked, she had no difficulty in getting in. There was a hole big enough for her to crawl through right in the corner of the front door.

When the cat entered the stable she told Shep how two men had

eaten his supper; also what she had heard them say while she sat in the tree directly over their heads.

"You better go tell that big, black cat that came here today what you heard them say."

Presently in the enclosed stableyard you could have seen a big cat, striped like a tiger, talking to a large, black one, while a beautiful shepherd dog, a little stubby-tailed, yellow dog, a Billy goat and a long-eared burro stood listening.

"The tramps you have seen here are our kidnapers," said Billy, "who have followed us. Isn't there some hole or old door by which we can escape?"

"None that is not locked or barred," replied the striped cat.

"I don't care if they are locked or barred," said Billy, "if they are only old and rickety enough on their hinges, so I can butt them down."

"I had forgotten that goats have such strong heads," said the shepherd dog. "Come with me, and I will show you an old, low door at the back of the stable through which you can make your escape nicely, as no one can see you from the house."

A few minutes later anyone passing would have heard a resounding bang as if a heavy sledge-hammer had hit something. (Things generally did sound that way when Billy butted them.) Then all was still. But under the apple trees could have been seen quite

a little procession, consisting of a goat, a burro, a little dog and a big cat, winding its way stealthily along toward the cornfield at the opposite end of the orchard, into which the procession soon disappeared.

While this little group was marching softly away, the kidnapers were creeping around the house, trying to find some door or window unlocked, through which they could enter the farmhouse and get something more to eat. What they had eaten had only whetted their appetites.

"Hist, Jim! Come here!" whispered Tom. "I've found an open window."

He had found a low, narrow window, barely large enough for a person to crawl through, that led into the cellar.

"You crawl in first," said Jim. "You are smaller than I am."

"Let's light a match and see what's inside first," suggested Tom.

"They won't go off," replied Tom. "They are all wet."

"Go ahead, then, and drop yourself through. You can't have far to go before you strike the floor of the cellar and that can't hurt you, can it?"

"Go yourself!" replied Tom. "How am I goin' to get out if I hear someone comin'?"

"You're a fraidy-cat, that's what is the matter with you!"

"If you are so brave, go yourself!"

"I would, mighty quick, but I'm too big to squeeze through that little window."

"How do you expect to get anything to eat then, if you can't get into the cellar through the window?"

"I was calculatin' on you handing me out somethin' while I kept guard, or I thought you might perhaps unlock the cellar door for me."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, you are countin' on a good deal, it seems to me."

"Hist! I hear someone comin'!"

Quick as a flash Tom forgot his fear of what was in the cellar and dropped through the window. He landed on a pile of potatoes which let him roll to the floor in a jiffy, while Jim lay flat on the ground and wiggled himself along on his stomach through the grass, Indian fashion, until he came to a clump of low honeysuckle and lilac bushes, under which he rolled and lay perfectly still, scarcely

daring to breathe until whoever was approaching had passed. It proved to be the hired man.

"Thank the stars, he didn't have a dog to smell me out!" said Jim under his breath.

When everything was still again, Jim ventured back to the window to see how Tom had fared, and he was angry in a minute when he saw by the light of a candle stub which Tom had found that he was quietly sitting on an upturned soap box with a piece of pie in one hand and a chicken leg in the other, devouring them as only a half-starved man can.

"Hist! Here you! Hand me out some of that pie!"

But Tom pretended not to hear, and went on eating, enjoying Jim's discomfort hugely, for Jim had been so mean to him and had bullied him so long that, now he had the chance, he meant to get even.

"Say, you chump, hand me out a leg of that chicken and a piece of pie! And do it quickly, too, or I will pound you black and blue!"

Tom turned his head, gave a sickly grin and went on eating, just as if Jim had not spoken. This exasperated Jim, so that he picked up a clod of dirt and threw it at Tom. It missed his head, but hit the piece of pie in his hand and sent it flying across the cellar.

"Now will you hand me out something to eat or not?"

Tom's only answer was to walk to a hanging shelf, take down another pie, walk back to the soap box and begin eating it.

When he saw him go to the shelf, Jim thought he was going to get the pie for him, but when Tom sat down and began to eat that too, he thought he would explode with anger. He threw himself in front of the window and tried to crawl through. He pushed so hard that at last he got his shoulders half way in, but, horrors! he could not squirm through, neither could he back out, and there he was, like a pig under a gate, forced to call Tom to help him, or else stick there and see Tom eat all the good things his mouth was watering to taste.

"Oh, say, Tom! Call it square, and I'll do anything you want."

Tom, thinking he had teased enough and being a good-hearted fellow, went to his assistance, but not before he had made him promise again and again to do the first favor he asked. Besides, he was afraid if he did not help him he would make such a fuss that the household would be aroused.

It was one thing to go to his assistance and another to help him, for he was wedged in so tightly that it took all their combined forces to get him through, and when he did come, it was so fast that he went head-first into the pile of potatoes, knocking Tom over. As he fell, he staggered against the soap box, upsetting it, and in his endeavor to catch the box so it would not fall and make a noise, he knocked over the candle, putting it out, and they were left in total darkness.

For many minutes they did not dare move, for fear the racket they had made had awakened the family, but for once they were lucky—no one had been aroused.

After a time they grew braver and lighted their candle and finished their meal by drinking a whole pan of fresh milk. Then they crept slowly up the cellar stairs, unlocked the door and went out without being heard.

"Now for the circus animals," said Jim. "We should be able to get them out of the stable and be many miles away from here before mornin'."

They hurried to the barnyard and crept around the stable, looking for an unlocked door to get Billy, Bettina, Stubby and Button through, when they came to the door that Billy had but recently butted down. Not knowing this, however, they entered in search of him and the other animals. They looked up in the haymow, under the stalls, and everywhere, even in places no cat could even crawl into but they saw neither hide nor hair of goat, burro, dog or cat.

"I see it all at last!" exclaimed Jim. "That Billy goat has butted the door down and they have escaped us again."

"Probably if we look for their tracks just outside the door, we'll be able to follow them," said Tom.

"Sure we will! Come on!"

But as they stepped out of the stable, they were confronted by a big, shepherd dog who refused to let them pass.

"Stumped again!" said Tom.

"Get me a pitchfork," said Jim. "I'll see if any dog is goin' to stop me!"

Tom went for the pitchfork, but he did not take it to Jim. Instead he crawled through an open window on the other side of the barn, taking the pitchfork with him as a weapon to protect himself should the dog attack him. But he was counting on the dog not hearing him, being so taken up with watching Jim.

"Hurry up!" called Jim. "Are you makin' one?"

But there was no answer. All he could hear was the cows as they chewed their cuds and the horses stamping in their stalls.

"Drat take it! Whatever could keep him so long?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE KIDNAPERS HAVE A FALLING OUT

JIM never dreamed of such a thing as Tom daring to desert him. Growing impatient at last, he went to look for a pitchfork himself. He found none, however, so was forced to come back with a shovel instead.

Shep still stood guard at the door. He didn't intend to bite the kidnapers or injure them in any way if they let him alone and stayed in the barn, but he was not going to allow them to leave it until his master had seen them in the morning. Then if his master said to let them go, all right. If not, he would do just what his master told him to do.

"Get out o' there, you dog!" ordered Jim, as he made a strike at Shep with the shovel. The shovel missed him, and Shep made a spring, grabbing the man by the coat tail. The kidnaper tried to hit him, but could not, as he jumped aside, taking the coat tail he had in his mouth with him. This he dropped and then jumped for the other tail, but missed it. At the same time the kidnaper

struck at him, hitting him on the side with the shovel with such force that it knocked him five feet away and left him senseless.

Now was the kidnaper's chance to escape before the dog recovered, and he took to his heels and ran through the orchard in the direction in which Billy and the rest had gone only a short time before. He kept running and running, afraid to stop for fear the dog would recover his senses and pursue him. He came to a little stream, through which he ran to throw Shep off the scent, should he try to track him in that way. On he went until he had to stop for sheer exhaustion. Seeing a straw stack ahead of him, he made for that, crawled in under the straw, glad of its warm covering as he was in a cold perspiration from fear and his run.

Feeling that he was safe for a while at least, Jim fell asleep, hoping that Tom would try to come out of the barn and Shep would take after him, for he still believed Tom was in the barn, either looking for a pitchfork or perhaps asleep in the haymow. Jim must have slept about an hour when he awoke, feeling quite refreshed and well dried. As he lay there, looking out of the little hole he had crawled through, wondering what had become of Tom and if he would ever find Billy and Bettina, he was startled to hear a noise like someone snoring not three feet from him. The sound seemed to come from the inside of the straw stack.

"That's strange! It surely sounds like a person snoring, but it

must be some big, fat pig has fallen asleep just outside the hole I am in. No, the sound does not come from that direction. I'll stick my head out and see who or what's makin' that noise."

Though he looked high and low, up and down, he could see no person or animal. Still the snoring went on, interspersed with a sigh or groan as if the sleeper was having bad dreams.

"It sounds so near I'm goin' to dig a hole with my hands straight into the straw in the direction the sound comes from and see what I will find."

He had not pulled out more than an armful of straw when his hand struck something more soft than straw. He began to pull it, which brought forth a scream of pain, and he discovered he had a handful of someone's hair. The next handful of straw revealed a face peering at him through the opening, and whose should it be but Tom's! They were both so surprised at seeing each other there that they said nothing for a few minutes but just stared at one another, for each had thought the other miles away, and deep in their hearts they hoped never to lay eyes on one another again.

But fate seemed to decide otherwise and kept these two together in spite of themselves.

As the two kidnapers lay concealed in the stack, talking over their last experience and wondering in which direction to go to look for Billy and Bettina, they heard footsteps approaching the stack. They could not make out at first whether they were the footsteps of people or animals for there seemed to be a soft, padded step and a hard, ringing one.

"Keep still till we see who is comin'," said Jim.

In a second around the straw stack came Billy, Bettina, Stubby and Button, chatting together pleasantly, as only four jolly, good companions can do.

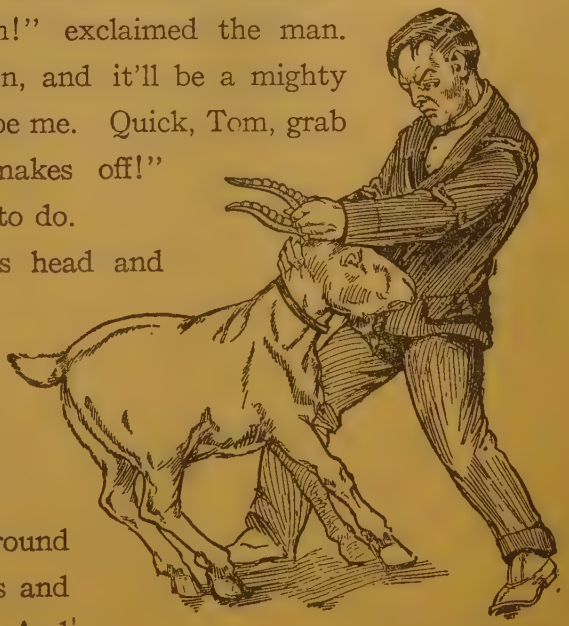
They came straight for the holes the men were in and Billy and Bettina began to eat the straw, pulling it out until the men were afraid their feet would be exposed.

While Billy and Bettina were eating, Stubby wandered off toward the farmhouse, which was near by, to see if he could not find something to eat while Button crouched down to catch some unsuspicious rat or mouse that might run out from under the stack.

"I smell old leather," said Bettina, curling her lip over her nose in a disgusted manner.

"So do I," replied Billy. "There must be some mouldy old shoes lying around here somewhere."

Just as Billy said this, Jim reached forward and grabbed Billy by the beard. It took him so by surprise that he jumped back with such force that he pulled the kidnaper out of the stack as if he had been shot from a gun. And there they stood—the goat and man facing each other, the man hanging to the goat's beard.



"You old son-of-a-gun!" exclaimed the man. "At last I have you again, and it'll be a mighty long day before you escape me. Quick, Tom, grab that burro before she makes off!" which Bettina was about to do.

Jim held on to Billy's head and Tom to Bettina's ear, while they led them over to a corner of the fence where they saw a rope hanging. This they cut into two pieces and put around Billy's and Bettina's necks and tied them to the fence. And they took the precaution to tie the ropes so short that neither could chew themselves loose.

"There, old man, I guess you are fixed for a while!" said Jim as he tied an extra hard knot in the rope. "Now you stay here

until I get hold of that dog and cat and we will have a rehearsal of that circus performance we saw you four go through on the road before you gave us this last slip. And you are to understand that you will go through these performances in your very best style if you want anything to eat or drink. If you don't, we'll see that you get a little judicious prodding with a sharp pitchfork, which will help you, I think."

"Well, Billy, I guess we are in for it for a while."

"It looks that way now, Bettina, but we will find some way to escape soon. The best way will be for us to pretend we like to perform and go through our tricks as if we enjoyed doing them. Then we must hang around and act as if we liked the men until they think we would not run away if we had the chance."

"That will be mighty hard for me," said Bettina, "for my heels just ache now to fly out and kick them over that chicken coop. Heehaw! Heehaw! Heehaw!" which, interpreted, meant: "Come over here, Button; we have something to tell you."

When Button joined them, they told him of their plan to appear docile and to act their best when the kidnapers wanted them to perform until the men were off their guard and left them untied, when they would all run away.

While they were talking, Stubby joined them, and they told him all they had confided in Button. They were still talking to-

gether when the kidnapers came back from their hunt for Stubby and Button.

"Jim, here they are with the goat and burro," called Tom. "Come around the straw stack and see them standing together."

"Hurry up now, Tom, for this is our chance to catch them."

What silly men to call out what they intended doing, thinking that animals do not know what is said, I suppose. The minute Jim spoke, Button ran up the straw stack and Stubby ducked under the barn.

"Drat take that dog and cat!" exclaimed Jim on seeing them disappear. "I am tired chasin' all over the place for them and now I have found 'em they keep runnin' away and dodgin' me. It looks as if we'd have a pretty time catching them. You go and try to get the dog from under the barn while I try to get that cat. Here, pussy, pussy, pussy!" he called, standing at the bottom of the stack and trying to induce Button to come down.

But Button only hunched his back and walked around on the top of the stack as unconcernedly as possible.

Jim lost his temper and picked up a stone, throwing it at Button, calling out as he did so: "Come down off there, you black imp!"

Button dodged the stone and whisked down the opposite side of the stack. Jim ran around and tried to stop him, but when he reached the other side of the stack Button was making streaks

across the barnyard with his tail held high in the air and Jim was just in time to see him slip between the pickets of the fence separating the barnyard from the yard before the kitchen door of the farmhouse.

"Go to blazes! I shan't chase you any more, but will wait till I get the chance to catch you unaware."

"Jim, I can't coax the dog out. I'll have to wait till he comes out of his own accord and then pounce on him."

"Baa, baa, baa!" from Billy. "Come back, Button and Stubby; come out from under the barn and do what the kidnapers want so they will untie us. They want to have a dress rehearsal before they go before the farmer's family to give a performance. Come ahead quick and let's see what they propose doing and how the family take performing animals outside of a circus."

So Stubby and Button allowed themselves to be caught.

And in a few minutes from that time the old brindle cow and white horse who were standing in the barnyard brushing flies from their sides were so startled at the antics these strange animals were going through that they nearly turned to stone. As for the pigs, they ran off with fright and the chickens and ducks ran squawking and cackling to places of safety. As for the turkey gobbler, he nearly gobbled his head off to express his disgust at the undignified behavior of a dog standing on its head on a burro's back, while at the same time a cat sat up between the burro's ears.

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

"Hup-la! Hup-la!" called Jim, as he cracked a long circus whip at Bettina's heels to make her hurry around the improvised circus ring they had made in the barnyard between the stacks of hay and straw, corn crib and barn.

"Well done! Well done!" exclaimed Tom, rubbing his hands with pleasure at seeing how well the animals could do their tricks.

"Bet you we'll make piles of money travelin' around the country a-showin' them off," Tom said to Jim, in exultation.

"Bet we do, too!" replied Jim, who for once had a smile of pleasure on his face instead of one of sarcasm or disgust.

"Come ahead; let's go put them through their tricks for the farmer's family, and as it's nearly dinner time, I bet we can get a dinner out of 'em as well as a few pennies."

"Hold on a minute, Jim, until I make a flute out of one of these little branches, and with that, a fine-toothed comb and a jews-harp I can make music enough for them to dance by."

"Dance by!" exclaimed Jim in a disgusted tone as if he thought Tom had taken leave of his senses.

"Yes, certainly. All animals that be trained as them animals are, are trained to dance."

"Any crazy high stepping can be called dancing."

"You just wait and see when I come back and begin to play!"

Tom was gone only a short time, but while he was away Billy

Billy Whiskers Kidnaped

Bettina, Stubby and Button put their heads together and planned what they would do when Tom began to play. "First," said Billy, "we will walk around in a circle, slowly lifting first one foot and then the other higher than usual, and swinging our heads from side to side. The second time around, we will turn our bodies completely, as in a waltz, still swinging our heads from side to side. The third time around we must go faster and faster until we fall over in a dizzy whirl. Our falling over will please the crowd."

"Capital! A capital idea!" said Bettina.

And of course Stubby and Button thought the same.

"Here comes Tom!" exclaimed Stubby, "and he's playing a tune on his willow whistle. As soon as he gets up near us, let's walk to meet him in a row. Then let's circle around him and begin dancing. It'll be fun to see the surprised look on their faces."

Tom really made quite a waltz tune with his whistle, jew's-harp

and comb, which he alternated in such a manner that one would think two or three persons were playing.

Jim was so taken back when he saw them begin to dance that his knees grew weak and he dropped on the straw stack, where he sat staring until his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

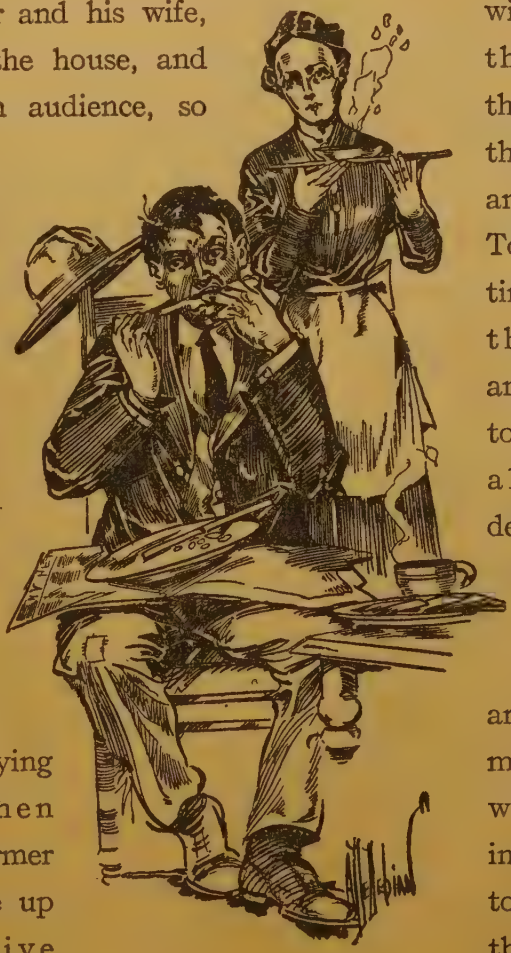
Tom was also so taken back that he could scarcely play, but he soon recovered from his surprise and entered into the sport of the dance so much that he danced around with them, first hopping on one leg and then on the other as he went from waltz time to jig, and then into a march. They were at the heighth of the dance, whirling and swinging to the strain of the music when the farmer's young children ran around the barn to find where the music came from. They stopped stock still, too much surprised to believe their eyes when they saw what was going on. Then they too fell into the swing of the dance, joined hands and circled around with glee and laughter.

The children's delight pleased the performers greatly, and they kept on and on, never seeming to tire.

One of the little girls broke away from the ring and ran to the house to bring her father and mother and the rest of the household, who were still at dinner.

While she was gone, they all took a rest and waited for the people to come from the house. When they heard them approach-

ing, they all jumped up and began to dance again, so when the farmer first saw them they were dancing.



The farmer and his wife, with some guests who were at the house, and the hired help made quite an audience, so that when they were through there was great enthusiasm and loud applause.

Jim and Tom now thought this a good time to put their animals through their other tricks, and they seemed quite pleased to perform. After they had done all they could think of, Jim declared the show over and Tom and he took off their hats, passing them around for money.

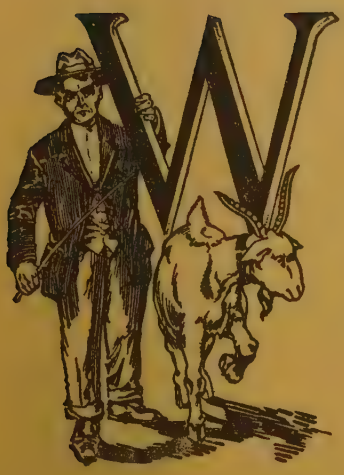
As farmers are not in the habit of carrying money in their pockets when working in the fields, the farmer invited Jim and Tom to come up to the house and he would give them some. The

farmer's wife said she would give them a good hot dinner and also feed the dog and cat, which the children were now patting. The older children said they would feed the goat and burro and give them a drink of fresh water.

So everyone was happy after the performance.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FOUR FORM A PLOT



WHILE Jim and Tom were eating their dinner, the children as well as the older people asked many questions as to where they had gotten the animals, how long they had had them, whether it was hard to train them, how they did it, if they were ever in a circus, and countless others.

All of these inquiries Jim answered, making up as plausible stories as he could think of at the time.

He told them that Bettina had come from Central Asia, where a tribe of little red men ruled, and that their king always rode behind six little, snow-white burros hitched to a golden chariot, set with precious stones. He said the curtains were of crimson, trimmed with gold fringe and lace, while the harness was red leather, with buckles to match. And on the forehead of each little burro shone

a diamond star, and between their ears waved a big bunch of crimson ostrich plumes. He said he had tried very hard to buy a white burro to bring to America, but the king never allowed any to be sold, as he kept them all for his own use, but that he succeeded in getting this one out of the country by paying a big price to its keeper.

"This burro," added Jim, "belonged to the queen's stable. The queen's burros are always mouse color, like this one, and her chariot is lined with royal purple, with harness to match, a complete duplicate of the king's, only purple instead of crimson. And the royal princes' and princesses' are in yellow and green. Oh, I tell you what, that is an interestin' country to visit, but few travelers ever get there as it's almost inaccessible, hid in a valley between snow-capped mountains, thousands of feet high. I went over in a balloon and back the same way or I should have never gotten there in the first place. As it was I was nearly killed, for I was set upon by the natives while tryin' to get this burro into the balloon. I'd just gotten her in by havin' a big, giant-like man lift her up, which he did as easily as if she'd been a kitten, when I heard the sound of fifes and drums and the clatter of swords and scabbards and the rush of many feet. I turned to see what was comin' and there, a-comin' toward me, was the king's army, headed by the king himself. They had discovered the presence of strangers in their kingdom and the theft of one of their queen's burros. I waited until they were within

fifty feet of me, and then I cut the rope that held the balloon to the earth and, wavin' my hand to them, I sailed up and off over the mountains."

The children stared at him, open-mouthed, while he was telling this tale, while the hired man did the same, but the farmer smiled to find what a clever liar Jim was to make up such a story off-hand to tell the children so they would be more interested than ever in the burro.

"Where did you get that goat, mister?" asked one little girl.

"Oh, I found him fighting a big Polar Bear away up near the North Pole. He's so big and white I guess the bear took him for another bear, but he soon found out his mistake when he got in a quarrel with him and Billy ran his sharp horns into him. I captured the goat just after he had butted the big Polar Bear off an iceberg into the polar sea."

"Where did you get that cat?" inquired a second little girl.

"Oh, I got him down near the equator in a big forest filled with monkeys. He was trying to hang on a limb by his tail, like the monkeys do. But, of course, though his tail was as long as theirs and he could easily twist it around the limb as they do, he hadn't been born to hang from limbs so his tail would not stay curled around the limb, but let him fall. The fall stunned him, and I saw my chance as he lay there, so I slipped up and put him in my

hunting bag and carried him back to the ship and brought him home with me. He has the largest eyes I ever saw in any cat."

"Now you have told us where you got all but the dog, and I want to know where he came from," said a little boy.

"The dog has a peculiar history. I rescued him from a Chinaman just as he was going to drop him in a kettle of boilin' oil to cook for his supper. The little fellow seemed so thankful and stuck to me so close that I've kept him with me ever since, and I must say I never knew a smarter dog than he is."

There is no knowing how long Jim would have strung out his lies had not Bettina begun to heehaw in such a peculiar manner that it sounded as if she was laughing at him. The farmer remarked about it, and when he did so, Billy, as if appreciating the joke, joined in with his baa, and Stubby barked and Button added a prolonged ye-awl. Everybody laughed, which made Jim feel cheap and uncomfortable, and caused him to say that he thought they had better be moving along.

"We have appreciated your stories very much, and for the pleasure your performing animals have given us I will present each of you with a suit of my old clothes and fit you out in hats and shoes and besides I am going to give you five dollars as a little pin money."

The kidnapers thanked the farmer again and again for his gene-

rosity and said they would give him a performance free if ever they came back that way.

For weeks they traveled all over the country in this way, but getting farther and farther away from Billy's home and Nannie. And though Billy asked every crow he saw if they knew in which direction the Watson farm was, he never happened to speak to one who had ever heard of the place.

Billy was getting discouraged, besides tired to death with performing twice, and sometimes three times a day. So were Bettina, Stubby and Button and they were growing thin with the constant work.

They had tried time and again to run away, but they had become so valuable to the kidnapers that the men no longer took the risk of letting them run free but tied and locked them up every night. The kidnapers had made a clear thousand dollars above expenses since they had been traveling over the country with the animals and so had no idea of letting them escape.

Night after night and long after they should have been asleep, our four weary friends stayed awake and tried to plan some way to escape. But every attempt was foiled and the kidnapers were on their guard constantly. They had been so successful in performing that the kidnapers had taught them many new tricks and it was simply marvelous what they could do now in the way of enter-

tainment. They were often hired out to perform on some vaudeville stage when passing through a large town or village.

Their latest trick on the stage was for Billy to be dressed as a gallant in Louis XIV costume, with knee breeches, three-cornered hat, gold lace, and a sword at his side; Betina as a lady of the court, with flowered brocade, powdered wig, and La Belle hat with pink roses set jauntily on one side. Stubby was dressed as a page, and walked behind Bettina, beholding her silken skirts. This he did by having a hook fastened to one of his front paws, into which a loop of her dress was slipped, which held it securely as he walked along behind her on his hind legs. Button was also dressed as a page, and walked in front on his hind legs, with a long curve-handled staff, from which two long streamers hung.

In the center of the stage was placed a table on which a dainty luncheon was served, with two chairs beside it. When the curtain first went up, this was all that could be seen, but in a twinkling, to the music played by the band, in walked the procession, with Button in the lead and Billy and Bettina side by side, with Stubby following, holding up Bettina's train.

Billy and Bettina walked to the table and seated themselves, while Stubby and Button stood stiffly beside them. This scene always called forth loud applause and the curtain had to be run up time after time.

But it really was this elaborate performance that made them all rebel, for it was most wearisome standing up straight and walking on their hind legs. Besides, the clothes were most uncomfortable and Bettina complained that they nearly cut her in two when they tied the dress on her, they pulled the strings so tight.

Billy objected to the padded tights he had to wear, and to the high-heeled slippers. Of course the black shoes with their sparkling buckles and red heels were very fetching, but what cared Billy for that? What he wanted was to kick up his hind legs and frisk—a free goat in some green meadow. And what was more, he had about made up his mind that that was where he was going, even if he had to jump off the stage some night and butt his way through the crowd to get out.

Bettina was also becoming desperate and, like Billy, had made up her mind to kick off her dress with the long train, then run away.

Stubby and Button were of the same mind, but had promised to stick by each other until they saw a chance to escape, for they, being small, could get away much easier than Billy and Bettina.

"Any time you are ready to go," said Button, "just give me the wink, and with a whirl of my tail I will run up the poles of the drop curtain and jump from that to one of the upper boxes, then run to one of the windows and go down the fire escape."

"I," said Stubby, "will jump off the stage opposite the middle aisle and scoot down the aisle and out the front door before anyone can collect his senses enough to stop me."

That night they had the most successful performance they had ever had and the audience applauded so long and loudly that they were forced to come out again and again.

In the middle of one of the acts, when Bettina was walking along, one of her hind legs cramped from walking on it so much in the unnatural position, so that she was forced to stop and then she had to drop on her four legs to rest. She simply had to rest or fall over, as her hind legs refused to support her any longer. She looked so comical on all fours, with her wig and dainty clothes, that the audience howled with laughter, but it made the kidnapers so angry

that they beat her unmercifully when they had her back of the stage, thinking she had done it on purpose to spoil the performance. They did not know she had a stiff leg and thought they had to beat her to keep her from repeating it the next night.

But there was to be no next night, for the good-hearted stage manager had Jim arrested for cruelty to animals, and he was carried off to the police station, where he had to pay a big fine.

But better than this, and what helped them most, was that a young lad, one of the stage hands who loved animals and had seen Jim beating the helpless little burro, made up his mind he would free them from their cruel master, so that night when Tom had taken off their fine clothes and securely tied and locked them in the stable, this boy went to the barn, crawled through an open window, untied Billy and Bettina and led them out a back door, through a deserted alley, across a vacant lot, down the railroad track, across a stream and into a woods, where he left them to hide and escape as best they could.

"Now hurry and get as far away from here as you can before morning," said the boy, as he turned them loose and hurried back to town.

"Oh, does it not seem like heaven to get back in the woods again?" asked Billy.

"I should think it does!" replied Bettina.

"Come, let's all go for a swim in the river before we strike across country," proposed Stubby.

"You fellows go, but I will stay on the bank and take my bath by proxy," said Button.

After their bath they felt quite refreshed and they all started on a fast run through the woods, keeping to the thickest part for fear some stray woodsman might see them and tell the kidnapers, should they track them.

They pressed on all night and it was early morning before they stopped a moment to rest, and Billy and Bettina ate some fresh, green grass and all took a drink from the swift-flowing creek which ran through the woods. Then they each took a few winks of refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XV

RESCUED FROM THE KIDNAPERS

THE NEXT morning Jim and Tom went to rehearse their performing animals and to add a few tricks to their usual act, for they had just been offered the largest sum of money they had ever gotten for a performance. They went to the barn in which they had locked them securely for the night, threw open the doors and stepped in, whistling.

Horror of horrors! Their animals were gone, and their high spirits dropped to zero and their whistles became groans for every stall was empty and not an animal was in sight.

Tom dropped back against the side of one of the stalls, with his hands held over the pit of his stomach. The surprise had been too much for him and made him feel ill.

Jim showed his disappointment by swearing and abusing and kicking everything that came in his way.

The front door of the stable was as securely locked when they

entered as it had been when they left the night before; so was every other door shut, which showed plainly that the animals had not gone of their own accord.

"If I ever catch the dog-gasted, measly person that stole those animals, I'll punch his head until his nose sticks out the opposite side," said Jim, stamping around the stable, looking in all the stalls and dark corners to see if, by any chance, he could find the animals hiding.

"What are you a-goin' to do about it, Jim?" asked Tom. "It's a roaring shame they should have escaped us just now when we've been offered such a big sum of money for their performances. Tell you what let's do—see if we can't track them. The ground should be soft after last night's rain which should make it easy to find the goat's and burro's tracks, if not the dog's and the cat's."

"Right you are, Tom! You look around the back door for them, while I will look around the front door."

Jim found many tracks, both going in and out of the stable, but they all led toward the theatre, so he supposed they were mostly tracks made the day before, when the animals were taken to and from the theatre. He looked closely at the ground around the side door, but saw not a single indication of any animal's tracks, let alone those he was looking for.

"Jim, oh, Jim!" called Tom. "I think I've found some."

It took Jim only a few seconds to reach the back door where Tom was, and there in the soft mud he saw plainly the perfect footprints of a goat and burro, and also those of a dog. But no cat tracks did he see. That was not strange, as Button had walked on some straw until near a fence and then had run along on the top of that as far as it went, which carried him away from the stable and across a wide lot.

"No use stoppin' to look for that cat's tracks," said Jim, "for you may be sure that where the others are, there he is too."

So now like two setter dogs on the trail of a bird, they followed the trail which took them straight to the woods. Here, search as they would, they could find no tracks of any kind, for the wet fallen leaves and long grass hid all footprints.

"See if we can't tell by the broken twigs on the bushes and the trampled down grass," said Tom, "if they have not passed this way."

"Happy thought," said Jim. "Of course the goat and burro would nibble at the tender green leaves and break off branches to chew as they went along."

Sure enough that is just what they had done, for the bushes showed plainly where twigs had been bitten or pulled off.

The kidnapers followed the trail in this way until they came to a little stream and here on its soft, sandy border they found tracks of a goat, burro, dog and cat.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" said Tom, throwing his cap in the air and catching it as it fell, "we are on their track!"

Being assured that they were following the right trail, they walked faster and faster, hoping to catch up with the animals at every turn, but no matter how fast they went, they did not overtake them and they soon found they had traveled many miles without seeing hide or hair of them. Yes, they had seen tufts of hair on many bushes, for Billy's and Bettina's sides had brushed against the thorns and briars and they had pulled out little tufts of hair.

"How much farther do you suppose those blamed animals could have gone?" at last asked Jim in a disgusted tone.

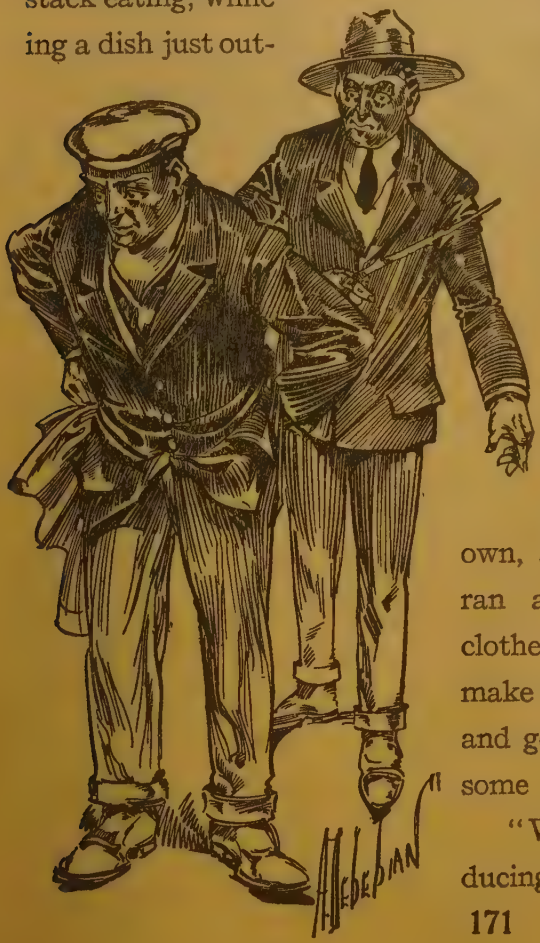
"They must have kept on a trot all the time to get such a start of us, or else they started early in the evening and have been traveling all night. As it is, we can't catch them now and get back to town in time for the performance."

"Gee! That's so!" exclaimed Jim. "We had better not go back without them but just let the people think we all lit out together."

"It's a shame, though, to have to lose all that money," said Tom, with a shake of his head. "Come on, let's hurry. I see the smoke from a farmhouse rising over the treetops. Perhaps they've stopped there."

The kidnapers hurried on, and when they came nearer to the

house, they hid in ambush to have time to watch to see if Billy, Bettina, Stubby or Button would appear. They did not have long to wait, for soon they saw Billy and Bettina standing by a hay stack eating, while Stubby and Button were licking a dish just outside the kitchen door, which proved that they had already made friends with the farmer.



"I never saw such blamed animals in my life for takin' care of themselves and makin' friends, did you?" remarked Tom.

"No, I never did! But all we have to do now is to go up and claim them as our own, and say they broke loose and ran away. Wish we had their clothes with us, and then we could make them perform for the farmer and get a dinner out of him. if not some money besides."

"What will you give me for producing the clothes?" asked Tom.

"A kick!" replied Jim, with a laugh and good-natured grin. "You think I can't get 'em, don't you? Well, for three cigars and a chew of tobacco, I'll produce 'em."

"Produce 'em! Show 'em up, and the cigars are yourn," said Jim.

And to Jim's surprise, Tom began to pull Button's dress from under the back of his coat, where he had stuffed it, and from the front Billy's trousers, while from numerous pockets and the tops of his boots he produced hats, wigs and other articles.

"Well, if you ain't a dandy!" said Jim. "Whatever made you think to bring 'em?"

"I thought maybe we might have just such a long hunt to find them, and be hungry when we did, so I stuck these things around in my clothes, so I wouldn't have the bother carrying a bundle, and then I would have their outfits in case we wanted to give a performance. Now see what a head I have for planning!"

"You're a brick!" exclaimed Jim. "Now the next thing is to catch 'em and dress 'em up."

"While they are off their guard, standing there eating, I'll sneak up and lasso them before they know we are within a thousand miles of 'em," said Tom.

"And I will go try to catch the dog and cat," said Jim.

Jim crawled through the long grass on his hands and knees

until he came to the yard fence, near a hole. Then he began whistling as if calling a dog.

Stubby, hearing the whistle, thought of course it was the farmer summoning him, so came bounding through the hole in the fence, but alas! instead of the farmer, he found himself in the arms of one of the kidnapers. He gave a howl of dismay, which caused Button to stop licking the plate and to run up a nearby tree, for he knew in a minute by the sound of the howl that Stubby was caught.

From Button's place in the tree, he could peer over the top of the fence, and there he saw poor Stubby, wriggling and squirming in the kidnaper's arms. As he was looking at Stubby, he heard a plaintive bleat, and, turning his head, he saw poor Billy half choked to death, with the tight rope of the lasso that was around his neck, and Bettina running wildly around and around the barnyard, heehawing as she went, looking for a means of escape.

At this juncture the farmer came out of the house to see what had caused the little burro to make such a fuss. He came face to

face with Jim, carrying Stubby in his arms. Jim was about to knock at the kitchen door and ask the assistance of the farmer in catching his animals.

Jim told a good story, which the farmer believed, and one which Stubby hoped would choke him in the telling, as he held the little dog in his arms. But no such good luck happened, and the next thing the four chums knew, they were dressed up in their fine clothes again and going over the oft-repeated performance at the back door of the farmhouse to the clapping of appreciative hands and the laughter of a pleased audience.

This thing went on day after day, until the four chums were tired nearly to death, when they began to recognize the country they were passing through as that not far from the old farm where Billy lived.

Could such good luck be true?

They put their heads together and talked over the surprise it would give Nannie, Billy Junior and the twins to see them dressed up in their fine clothes and performing tricks in front of their old home.

The kidnapers, not having recognized this part of the country as that from which they had stolen the animals, were trudging along all unsuspecting while the chums were laughing to themselves to think what a good joke it would be on the kidnapers when they

were showing the animals to have Mr. Watson come out and claim them as his own.

The four friends were so overjoyed at the prospect of seeing home and friends once more that they could neither sleep nor eat the last two days of the journey, for fear the kidnapers would recognize the country as being the same from which they had stolen them.

But the kidnapers had never known that part of the country very well and as it was pitch dark the night they stole Billy, and that over a year ago, they went blindly forward and, one might say, right into the very jaws of death, for they walked straight through Mr. Watson's front gate one bright morning, not even suspecting where they were going.

CHAPTER XVI

HOME AGAIN

HEAR music," said one of the twins to the other, as Billy Whiskers' grandchildren were playing under an apple tree at the old farm just one year from the time their grandfather had been kidnaped.

"I wonder why grandfather does not come back," remarked Judy.

"He'll come before long, I'll bet," replied Punch.

"Maybe he'll never come. He may have been killed," said Judy and her eyes filled with tears, for she was very fond of her indulgent grandparent.

"I wish," said Punch, "that he would come and take us on those nice walks and tell us about his adventures."

"I do, too. Besides, grandmother never smiles any more, and she spends all of her time on top of the highest straw stack. I asked her one day why she spent so much time up there, and she said she always went there when grandfather was away, to look for him, as

the stack is so high she could get a glimpse of him miles away when he was coming home."

"I think," said Punch, "that she is getting afraid he will never come back for I heard her sighing and saw a tear drop from her eye when she asked the crow the other day if he still had heard no news of him."

"Listen!" said Judy. "I *do* hear music, and I don't care what you say! Let's go see who is making it. There must be company at the house."

So the two ran off toward the front of the farmhouse.

"Children! Children!" baahed Daisy, their mother, "where are you going in that manner?"

"To see who is making that music," said Punch.

"If it is an organ grinder or traveling gypsy, don't go near them. Take care or you will be kidnaped, like your grandfather was," she cautioned.

"I'll go with them," said Billy Junior, their father, "for I am afraid they might be carried off. Don't you and mother want to follow us? It may cheer her up to hear a little music, for I have noticed she has felt much depressed lately."

"Yes, we will join you presently. You go ahead with the children, and we will soon be there!'

As it happened, Billy Junior and the twins were delayed in

reaching the front of the house until their mother and grandmother caught up with them.

When they all came around the corner of the house together they saw what appeared to be people with the queerest looking faces they had ever seen, but before they could give them a second thought, all these queer looking people dropped on their hands and ran toward them.

The twins took to their heels and ran down the hill to the shelter of the cow stable. But Nannie stood as if petrified, for whispering in her ear was Billy's voice coming from out one of those queer men's mouths. What could it all mean?

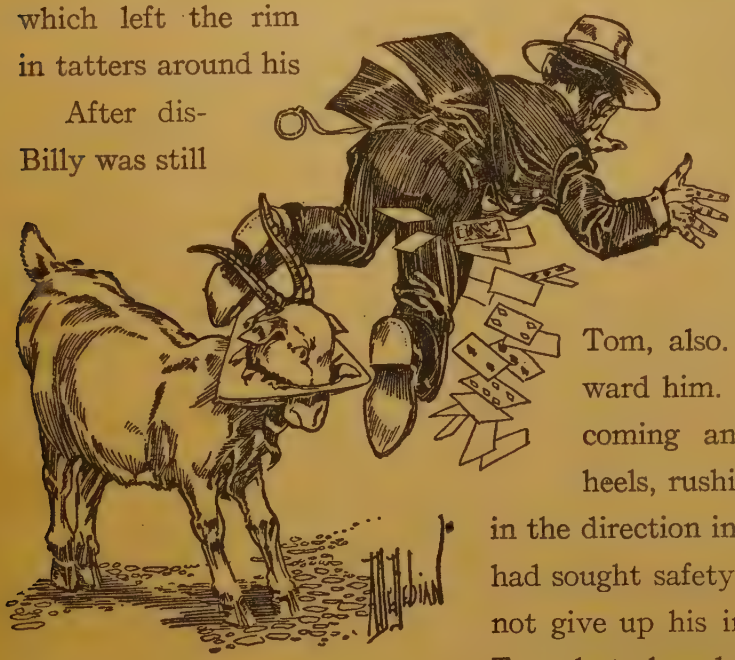
"Nannie, my darling little wife!" this voice was saying, "don't you know me in these clothes? I have come back to you, my sweetheart!"

"Here, you goat, get up on your hind legs and come away from that ninny Nannie goat," called Jim in a gruff voice, giving Billy a stinging blow of the whip, which, however, did not hurt him as it did not penetrate his clothes, but it touched Nannie on the nose, causing her to wince with pain.

This was too much for Billy. He could stand anything for himself, but to hurt Nannie was a crime in his eyes, punishable by death.

Billy wheeled on his hind legs, hunched his back with such force that he split his satin trousers and they dropped off. Then he made

a spring forward and butted Jim high in the air, landing him on top of the lilac bush before the door. He had butted so hard that his head had gone clear through the crown of his three-cornered hat, which left the rim hanging in tatters around his face.



After disposing of Jim, Billy was still so angry that he thought he might just as well get rid of Tom, also. So he ran toward him. Tom saw him coming and took to his heels, rushing down the hill in the direction in which the twins had sought safety. But Billy did not give up his intention to butt Tom, but chased him, gaining on him with every step. Seeing no trees to climb or shed in which to hide, Tom ran straight for a low stone wall that surrounded a duck pond, jumped the wall and landed in the water, making a terrible splash, and causing all the ducks and geese to set up a deafening clatter.

On seeing Tom up to his neck in water, Billy thought that was punishment enough for one while, so turned and went back to Nannie. On his way back he met her, Billy Junior, Daisy and the twins coming to meet him. And such a rubbing of noses and licking of faces you never saw as the family rejoiced over the return of the lost father and grandfather.

While this was taking place, the farmer was assisting Jim out of the bush, trying to see if Jim's back was broken, as he declared it was, and all the time he was doing it, Stubby and Button were trying to make Mr. Watson understand who they were and to get him to take off their clothes so he might see they were his own little dog Stubby and cat Button. So far the farmer had not recognized them in their costumes of pages as his own pets.

Presently Stubby and Button put their heads together and decided to chew at each other's clothes until some of them, at least, fell off. Button by chance got hold of the back of Stubby's coat with his teeth and when Stubby jumped forward the coat slipped off, and by rubbing his head along in the grass he was rid of the hat. And now he stood undressed all but the pair of little, tight trousers and high-heeled slippers.

Mr. Watson, chancing to turn just then, gasped with surprise when he saw Stubby's little yellow head and twinkling eyes looking up at him.

"Bless my soul, Stubby, is that you? How in the world did you happen to fall into this fellow's hands?"

In his joy at being recognized, Stubby barked and barked, and licked Mr. Watson's hands to try to tell him about the kidnapers and ask him to protect them from them.

On seeing that Mr. Watson recognized the dog, Jim was just making up what he thought a good story to tell of how he found the dog when Billy returned from the pond, followed by his adoring family. Mr. Watson recognized him immediately now that his clothes were off, and wanted to know how the men happened to be traveling around the country with his goat, dog and cat. But Jim was too much surprised at finding he had unwittingly walked into the yard of the owner of these animals to be ready with a plausible excuse as to how he came by them, so he only said he had found them wandering along the road and had picked them up one at a time and had taught them the tricks they had just gone through.

"Why did you not return them when you read the advertisement offering a reward for their return?"

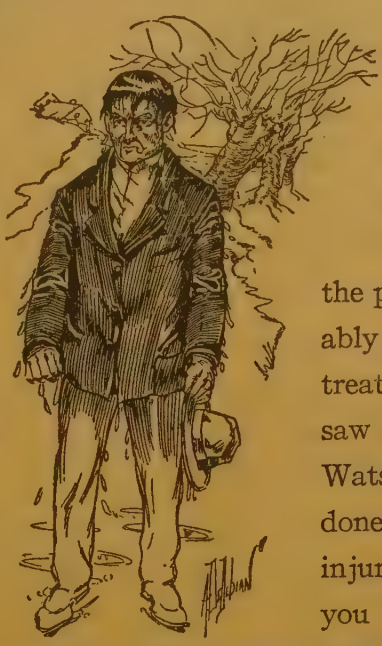
"Believe me or not," replied Jim, "I never saw it, as I don't read the papers. I ain't got no money to spend on papers. It took all my change to keep myself and them animals, for I fed them fine, as you can see by their fat sides."

"Yes, you probably fed them well so they would keep healthy

and be able to perform the tricks you put them through, which seems to be your only means of support."

At this moment Tom appeared at the top of the hill, and a sorry sight he was with his dripping wet clothes, and hair stringing over his face.

"Where did you come from?" asked Mr. Watson.



"I just came from the pond where Billy butted me. I can't imagine why my pet goat should have treated me so when I never did anything to him. I was just standing still doing nothing when he took after me and to escape him I jumped into the pond."

"He was probably getting even with you for past ill treatment and that was the first time he saw a chance to do so," suggested Mr. Watson.

"I ain't never done nothin' to him," said Tom in an injured tone.

"As long as you men did not know those animals belonged to me and have taken the time to teach them tricks, by which they have made a living for you both, I will give you each twenty dollars to keep you until you can find

something else to do for a living," said Mr. Watson, for it was plain to be seen he meant to keep his pets.

"Couldn't sell 'em so cheap—seems we got so attached to 'em and taught 'em so many tricks. You see we might never be able to find such smart ones again. We have tried to teach lots of other goats, dogs, cats and burros tricks, but they were so stupid we couldn't," said Tom.

"I am very sorry for you, but money could not buy these pets of mine," said Mr. Watson. "The burro does not belong to me, but she belongs to a neighbor, who is as fond of her as I am of my goat, dog and cat, and he has spent many dollars trying to find her. So I am afraid you will have to give up even her."

The dinner bell rang just then and Mr. Watson invited both Tom and Jim to go around to the kitchen and said he would tell the cook to give them a good dinner before they started on their sorry way, without an animal to earn their living for them.

While the kidnapers were sitting under the trees waiting for the cook to call them to dinner, Jim said: "Tom, I tell you what we will do. We'll say good-bye, go down the road as if we were leavin', first makin' a big fuss with tears in our eyes as we say good-bye to the goat and burro as if it was breakin' our hearts to leave em'. Then we will go down the road a piece and hide in the bushes until near midnight, when we are sure everybody is asleep. Then we

will sneak back and kidnap 'em over again, right from under their owner's nose."

"You can't do it, Jim. We will never be able to steal the four of 'em without help, and when we can find someone who will be willin' to help us I don't know."

"There you go again, throwin' cold water on all my plans."

"It would take a twenty horse power engine to pull Billy Whiskers alone away from that Nannie goat and a regiment of men to catch that dog and cat and burro, for I'll bet you the minute they see us comin' they would suspect what was up and give the alarm by barkin', baahin', brayin' and mewin', and I can tell you I wouldn't care to be in our shoes should Mr. Watson find us tryin' to steal 'em."

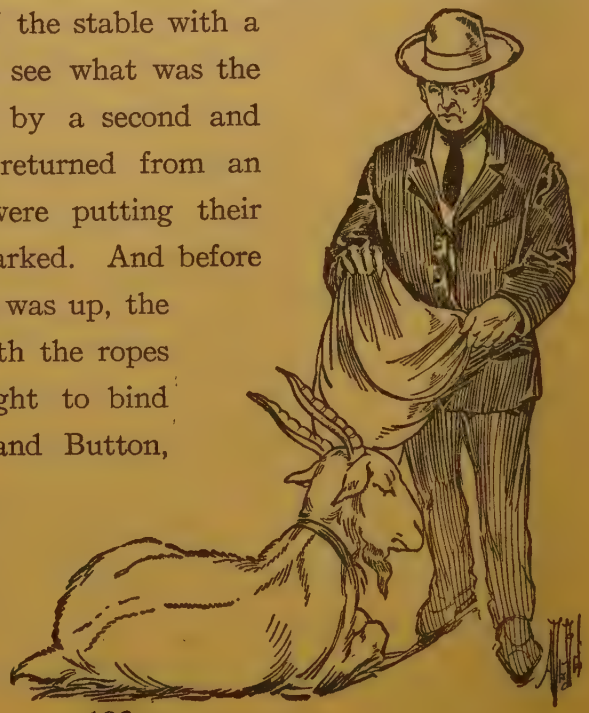
"Very well, you chicken-hearted coward! If you won't help me, I'll go to the nearest town and get someone who will, for have those animals I will!"

"Go ahead, then, for I wash my hands of the job. And I'll bet you get caught and arrested. And if you do, the first person you will be a-callin' for will be me to bail you out."

I don't know what argument Jim ever used to persuade Tom to help him, but that night at ten minutes to twelve the two kidnapers could have been sneaking through the stable yard with ropes and bags thrown over their arms to assist in the capture of the animals. They went straight to where Billy lay asleep, surrounded by his

loving family and faithful friends, Bettina, Stubby and Button.

Stubby, who had been sleeping with one ear open, was awakened from a dream in which he thought the kidnapers had them again, to find it was almost a reality, for there stood Jim just ready to throw a bag over Billy's head and Tom a rope around Bettina's neck, and he gave the alarm by barking furiously. This awakened everyone on the place, it was so loud and sharp, and in two minutes the hired man ran out of the stable with a pitchfork in his hand to see what was the trouble, quickly followed by a second and third. They had just returned from an evening in town, and were putting their horses up when Stubby barked. And before the kidnapers knew what was up, the men had bound them with the ropes the kidnapers had brought to bind Billy, Bettina, Stubby and Button, and they were hustled into the barn and locked in the harness room until morning, when a patrol-wagon was sent for and



the kidnapers were carried off to jail, where they could do no more harm.

As the wagon drove out of the yard, Billy baahed, Bettina brayed, Stubby barked and Button ye-awled as if they were saying, "Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

And now that the kidnapers are safely locked in jail and Billy, Bettina, Stubby and Button are once again back on the old farm, happy in the midst of their friends, we will leave them for another year and see what happens then.

THE END.

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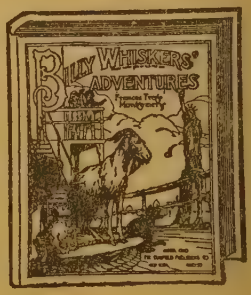

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